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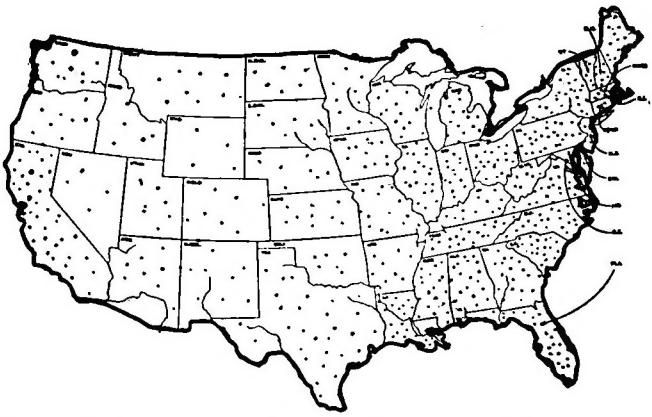

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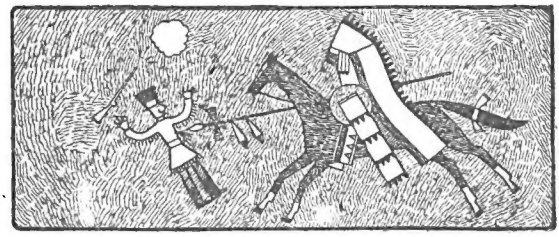
No 5



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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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NEXT MONTH

The April ADVENTURE, out March 3d, has good things in store for you—and a trip pretty well all over the world while you are getting them. Its stories take you not only to various parts of our own country, but to Bering Sea, Morocco, Central America, Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, Alaska, Egypt. One of these stories is

"The Soul of a Regiment"

By Talbot Mundy

Appearing in ADVENTURE over five years ago, this wonderful short-story created more enthusiasm than anything else we ever published. For years we've been unable to meet demands from old readers for copies of that issue. Our circulation has doubled since then and most of our present readers have never read this story. So we are doing what we never did before — publishing a story the *second time*. It is certainly worth it.

"Fair Salvage"

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

A story about *Captain McConaughy* is good wine that needs no bush. This one has to do with a ship he met and—well, became acquainted with.

For the other April stories, see the last page of this number.

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1917
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No 5

BLUFF AND A LITTLE LUCK—

An Everhard Story

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Gordon Young

Author of "A Royal Flush of Hearts"

THERE seemed to be nothing to do except to sit up in bed with my hands raised and keep quiet so as not to make the fellow behind that black mask nervous. I always was a little squeamish when a gun was in somebody else's hand; but as a man who plays poker as much as I do has a lot of practise in the gentle art of self-control, I tried to look neither frightened nor at my ease.

A man who breaks into your room around 3 A.M. gets suspicious if you look too much at ease. He thinks you have something up your sleeve and as a precautionary measure he is likely to bat you over the head. I didn't want to be batted over the head. I wanted to see if he would look where I didn't want him to.

I could have told him that he had made a mistake; that my name was Donald Everhard, not J. J. Spearman as I had written on the hotel register. But he seemed to think he knew what he was about so I said nothing while he went through my clothes and suit-cases. Of course he found plenty of letters addressed to J. J. Spearman and he took time to read some of them. What was in them, I don't know.

He was a thorough sort of fellow and seemed to have had a lot of practical experience in looking in other people's rooms for things that were not easily found. He went through the drawers. He looked behind the pictures tacked on the wall. He ran his hand along the edge of the carpet clear around the room. Then he made me get out of bed, and one by one jerked the covers off and the pillows and carefully searched the mattress. I think by that time he was inclined to feel a little disgusted.

He hadn't said a word, but his eyes were beginning to be expressive. He pressed the muzzle of that big revolver against my stomach and held it there while he searched my pajamas, running his hand over every inch of my body.

I'm not a quarrelsome fellow nor am I one of those bold chaps who can talk wittily when the other fellow has the drop. But I asked him for Heaven's sake to take that thing away from my stomach.

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He said, "Shut your mouth or I'll blow your head off."

If I had been witty like some people I have heard tell of their experiences with burglars I might have pointed out to him that to make good that threat he would have to take it away from my stomach. But I didn't. I shut my mouth and reflected that I now knew why he hadn't spoken before, and wouldn't have spoken at all if he had not been exasperated. He had a pronounced foreign accent. I wasn't surprised.

Foreigners are prone to be irascible. They don't play poker enough over in Europe. There is no game like it for teaching a man to keep his temper when he is beaten. Not that I have the slightest dislike for foreigners. If they are Americans I don't care where they were born or how many of them come. The Foreign Legion of France shows how splendidly men uphold an alien banner to which they pledge themselves. But I was rather sure that this fellow was "hyphenated" else he would not have been searching my room for the blue-print of J. J. Spearman, naval constructor.

He glared at me, then looked about disgustedly at the scattered bedclothing, at the emptied suit-cases which he had spilled on to the floor, at the drawers dragged from the dresser. Then he noticed the magazines on the table.

With a gesture he made me stand up against the wall, and going to the table kicked the crumpled newspapers aside and began turning the leaves of the magazines to make sure nothing was between them. I always read the newspapers before going to bed, and usually leave them scattered by my chair where they are dropped when finished. They got under his feet every time he took a step about the table, and he gave another bad display of temper in kicking them fiercely out of his way.

At last he reluctantly quit the search. My arms were very tired. I had been holding them straight above my head ever since he came. But it was scarcely a relief when he made me take them down and put them behind my back and tied them severely tight with strips of rawhide which he had with apparent foresight brought along for that purpose.

He drew from his pocket a "pear" gag and stuffed that into my mouth. He threw, rather than laid me on to the floor, and bound my feet. He was obviously making sure that I wouldn't give an alarm until he had had plenty of time to get away.

He was no ordinary burglar. He was a good schemer. Instead of sneaking from my room he left the lights burning, opened the door slightly and said "Good night" loudly and pleasantly so that if any one heard him it would be thought that he was a friend taking his leave.

I thought, old fellow, there are a lot of foreigners in this country who speak with much the same accent as yours, but I'll bet there are not many who have shoes made to order so as to accommodate a bunion on the right foot, and though you did have the judgment to take off all jewelry, I could see by the markings that you wear a ring on both the second and third finger of the left hand.

When one is trained to play poker one looks at more than the pips on the cards and the expression on the faces of the men about the table. Every little thing about a man is part of an index to his character, and though often these little indices are unintelligible, again sometimes they are not and prove valuable in sizing him up. For instance: If a man wears a certain kind of cuff-link I have discovered that it is well to be suspicious that he has a "hold out" contrivance up his sleeve.

I LAY quietly on the floor until I heard the bold steps of my burglarious caller pass down the hallway, because I wanted him to hear no sound that would bring him back. Then I rolled and squirmed until I got into the bathroom. I managed to tumble into the tub and, fumbling with my fingers behind my back, turned on the water and soaked my bound wrists.

One of the disadvantages of being born in Europe is not to know fully the characteristics of rawhide. Every American boy, particularly if he came even at an early age from a farm, knows that rawhide will stretch when wet. I soon had my hands and legs free and removed the gag.

Then I, too, kicked the newspapers. But I kicked them in a neat pile; that is as neat as one could with one's feet, while trying to get into a shirt and trousers at the same time. But I didn't kick them angrily. In fact, though I was in great haste, I smiled as I grabbed my coat, collar and tie to put on as I went down the hall.

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When the sleepy elevator boy answered my call I asked if he knew the gentleman that had just gone down. He said that he didn't, but that he had got off at the second floor. That was interesting. So I went down to the second floor and got off, too. The boy was too sleepy to give me much of a description for even a dollar. As has already been made evident, my burglar was not after money.

The Blackmore was a big hotel and suites on the second floor came high, so I could understand something of why my caller had not cared for what trinkets I possessed. I wandered about, going around and around until I found one room with light penciled at the bottom of the door.

I crouched low and listened. At least three angry voices in a foreign tongue were holding a suppressed conversation. I thought of going in and taking part; but I thought further and decided it might be better to wait until I had a more presentable excuse. The gentlemen within sounded agitated. One of them had a powerful, dominating voice and I didn't know just how easy it would be to explain to him if his character was to prove as impressive as his voice. Besides, no one in there had anything of mine or of J. J. Spearman's.

I went back to my room, called up the clerk downstairs and asked who had Suite C on the second floor. He said "Mr. Goss." I asked more about Mr. Goss, but the clerk was too well trained to tell me.

Then I did one of those impulsive things that I do frequently, and while they have a certain method in them they usually precipitate trouble; but often they make life interesting. Also, I thought I wouldn't have much difficulty in getting my burglar into hot water if he had, as I suspected, a subordinate position under Mr. Goss—or whoever was at the head of the gang, clan, organization or whatever it was.

I called up Suite C and a man who said he was Mr. Goss answered; but I thought his voice much softer and less impressive than when I heard it through the door—if his had been the voice that seemed to dominate the room inside.

I told him that I did not want to be annoying, but that something had happened which made me think perhaps I was doing a favor in telling him of it. I said that my room had just been burglarized and that I feared his was also spotted and would be entered if he did not watch. Mr. Goss instantly became much excited. Perhaps I imagined it, but also I thought I heard muffled and agitated foreign words spoken within the room.

Of course, I wasn't exactly telling the truth when I said that my burglar had been an exceedingly nervous fellow, that he fumbled frequently in his pockets, drew out papers and stuffed them back again, and that he had dropped and left a card with Mr. Goss's name and suite on it; that naturally I drew the conclusion that he had Mr. Goss marked down for a visit, and I was telling him all I knew about it for what it might be worth. Mr. Goss thanked me in an exceedingly strange tone, a rather bewildered tone it seemed; and I could not help smiling as I hung up.

Then I quickly began pawing among the newspapers, and finding one much more compactly crumpled than the others, I unfolded it, and took out the crumpled but uninjured blue-print. As I smoothed and folded it I noticed on the back in bold, strong writing the cryptic marking: "O. K. B 52." I didn't have the faintest idea as to what that meant. I slipped the blueprint into a large envelope, and addressed it to a name not found in any city directory.

Then I scribbled a card with Mr. Goss's name and suite number on it and went as excitedly as I could to the clerk downstairs. I told my story to him, explaining why I had asked about Mr. Goss, and demanded the house detective and police.

Quite a hubbub was created among the hotel officials, though they asked me to keep it out of the papers. It would be easier, they explained, to catch the burglar if he didn't know the police were on his trail. It is the same kind of an explanation that most hotels, solicitously protecting their reputation, offer. Anyway, I was not wishing to get into the papers under either my own or an assumed name.

The house detective, and particularly Mr. Goss who soon came on to the scene, were much concerned about the slip of paper which I had shown the clerk. I said I had laid it on his desk. He admitted that he had seen it. But no one could find it, for the very good reason that I had chewed it into pulp and flipped it away to prevent the possibility of the astute Mr. Goss submitting it to a handwriting expert. It had

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served its purpose in bringing Mr. Goss and myself together.

But it was only after looking me over carefully from a distance that Mr. Goss seemed inclined to be friendly. Of course, he thanked me and all that, but he didn't seem sure that he cared to be friendly until he had heard much of my story given to the house detective. I didn't tell the house detective all that I knew or anything that I thought. I didn't know who was signing his pay checks; and moreover, I always feel that it is the business of a detective to find out things for himself.

Mr. Goss was a stout man with a mustache. The mustache dominated his face. It bristled at the ends. A lot of men wear savage mustaches in the apparent hope of making people think they are dynamic and have strong characters. But Mr. Goss had the jaw and nose and forehead and eyes that showed very plainly that there was no wax on the tips of his mustache.

But though he had attracted favorable attention in financial circles, as I afterward made sure, and was the general manager of an export company and had lived at the Blackmore for three years, I didn't think he was a good man with whom to confide my family history. No, not even though he seemed to suspend all interest in his export business and devote himself to making my first day at the Blackmore agreeable to me.

He had me with him at breakfast; and at breakfast he had me promise to lunch with him; after lunch he took me to his room which I had already located; and after that I took dinner with him; and after dinner we again returned to his room.

By that time he seemed almost talked out, and I hadn't told him any of my family history. He proposed a game of cards and seemed quite delighted when at his request I named my favorite. But it takes at least three men to make a good game of poker. He had a friend, a Mr. Jones, a wealthy Welshman who as yet spoke only broken English, who liked poker; and, Goss added significantly, "he doesn't mind losing." But I pretended not to understand that Mr. Goss was willing that we should play against the unsophisticated Mr. Jones and trim him. Mr. Goss seemed just about ready to think that I was rather stupid.

Regrettably, after much delay and telephoning, it appeared that Mr. Jones could not be located. He had rooms at the hotel but had gone out.

Mr. Goss said that was "too bad" but that we surely would have the little poker party in his room the following night. Then for about the twentieth time he pressed me to take a drink with him. I never drink anything stronger than ginger ale; but I didn't tell him that. I just said—

"I am not thirsty."

There is nothing that so amazes a convivial man as to find somebody who won't take a drink. I don't know whether Mr. Goss noticed it or not in connection with my refusal to be thirsty while around him, but I managed to keep him always in front of me. If he attempted to pass behind me, I would start talking and turn. I neither wanted to be given chloral nor a whack over the head. Perhaps I misjudged him and he wanted me around only in the hope that I would become confidential.

His rooms showed that they were a permanent residence. They were comfortably furnished and had books, pictures, rugs and such portable things as the hotel management can not afford to offer transients. I've never seen a hotel room that had anything in it that one could cram into a suit-case. From a mere fleeting glimpse I got of a room adjoining the one in which Mr. Goss entertained me, I thought that he must also have a part of his office at the hotel.

After it was settled that Mr. Jones would be called in the next evening, I said I thought I would go to my room and go to bed, as my sleep had been broken the night before.

I was just going out the door when Mr. Goss called to me suddenly, as if he had not thought of it before, and said:

"I say, Mr. Spearman, you're a designer of some kind aren't you? A construction engineer or something?"

"How'd you guess it?" I asked in admiration.

Mr. Goss beamed and looked wise.

"I'll go further," he said. "You are a military or a naval engineer of construction."

"That's marvelous!" I exclaimed and urged him to tell me how he had discovered my profession.

"Simple enough. Simple. Very simple. I have trained myself to observe. To see. People don't see what's under their nose half the time. Also I am an expert at

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phrenology. Use it in my business. I could tell instantly that you were a mechanical genius. Your erect carriage marks you as a military man. Of course, I can't give you the details or the process of reasoning—but you see I was right."

I was visibly much impressed—at least I tried to be. I told him I thought I would take up the study of phrenology and also try to cultivate seeing things that were under my nose.

I went on to explain that no doubt if he had seen the burglar he would have noticed a lot of characteristics that would enable him to identify the man; then I described my burglar and described him different from what he was. That is, I said he was a big man with black hair and wore tan shoes; that he had on a brown suit and wore a ring on his right hand. I was emphatic about that ring and also about his size.

I was just ready to leave again when Mr. Goss asked:

"I say, Mr. Spearman, how did you manage to get untied so quickly. The detective told me that the burglar left you trussed—and you were up in no time."

That was precisely one of the things I had neglected to tell the house detective or any one else. Mr. Goss wasn't reading my character quite so accurately as he thought. But I explained about the tenuous quality of wet rawhide and he was thoughtful as I said good night and left.

I DIDN'T go straight to my room. It was the first time I had been away from Goss that day, though I was as interested in sticking close to him as he was in having me. Since I had declined to give my hand away to him, he had given his hand away to me. Unless he had done so, I wouldn't have been sure—that is, sure enough to go ahead and make whatever plans seemed advisable for getting myself out of the predicament into which Jimmy's letter had got me.

I was in close quarters. Not on my account so much as for Jimmy Spearman, I had to find out exactly what I was doing at the Blackmore and with whom I had to do it. I seemed to have got hold of the right party in allowing Mr. Goss to make himself friendly.

The evening before I had received an astonishing letter from Jimmy Spearman in Washington. As soon as I read it I had hurried to the express office and claimed his baggage with the checks he enclosed. Then I came straight to the hotel and registered under his name to await developments. They began about 3 A.M. when the lights were flashed on and I looked into a gun held by a man with a black mask. But Jimmy had warned me that desperate efforts would be made to steal the blue-print, and I was much concerned with the subsequent proceedings. It wasn't easy to keep my eyes off the scattered newspapers.

I knew I was in a tight hole, though as long as that woman Jimmy wrote about kept away I wasn't permitting myself to worry. To take a simile from the poker-table: I had suddenly been called in to play a hand that he had drawn. And I was being forced to play it without getting to see all the cards.

Moreover, I couldn't lay the hand down. I simply had to bluff it through. I have found that a man bluffs best when he has a set of fours, or in a pinch a straight flush, up his sleeve. I didn't have any such thing up mine this time. But I wanted to get ready as fast as I could for the show-down.

As usual when a situation is complicated and a fine man is perilously near disgrace, there is a woman, and a pretty one at that, somewhere in the background. The trouble is she never stays there.

I get along very well with men in our little counter purposes that sometimes arise, and once in a while I don't get much the worst of it. But women make me nervous. Particularly if they have dainty feet and hands, wear soft gowns and silk hose, and have eyes that lie no less than their bewitching lips, and have the subtle poise that detects and the swift grasp that seizes upon those vulnerable emotions that are in most men; or, in other words, if they are beautiful and wise with the wisdom of the serpent—mentor to their first mother.

The combination of beauty and the serpent's wisdom is not often met with, for which malekind should be thankful, else few of us would be free from some kind of heart-sickening folly. It is no trouble at all to find women wicked enough to please all the professors of criminology in the world; and the number of marriages show how readily women persuade men that they are beautiful; but it is only when a woman is both that she really plays the devil.

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She must be caressable as Leda who seduced the father of the gods and wicked as Kundry who laughed at Christ, to torment such a man as Jimmy Spearman into stealing almost the most precious plan of his Government so that he could sell it to a foreign agent for money enough to decamp to Argentina and try to live with her the rest of his life. And, too, there must needs be something of the witch about her to so befuddle his sense as to get him then to give her a note in which he as bad as admitted that he *had* stolen the plan and would *sell* it for a stipulated amount. The fact that the amount was exceedingly large perhaps indicated that like all bewitching creatures she was avaricious and perfectly willing to hold up her own employer.

So I was satisfied that whoever this Helen was she knew more than is taught in a boarding-school; and after a girl begins to do up her hair, I am much more comfortable if somebody else is engaging her attention, no matter how beautiful she may be.

I didn't have any trouble at all in thinking that Jimmy was crazy to write me that she was "a true woman," and "could be trusted to the limit," when on the same page he confessed that she had urged him to steal the vital plan of the most formidable submarine ever devised—a plan which, if kept from other governments, would do much to make our navy invincible. That only shows what a beautiful woman who has bitten into the acrid apple can do with a man. Like Eve, she makes him eat the core.

Jimmy's long, fragmentary, excited letter told that this Helen was the most beautiful creature that God ever made. I'm not a moral man in the eyes of some people, and certainly haven't as much reverence as is said to be good for the soul, but I don't like to hear these people who are in love blaspheme that way. And they all do it.

He said that he loved her no less than she loved him, which is the kind of lunacy that male lovers inevitably develop; and that while she was urging him to be a traitor to his Government, she, too, was becoming a traitor to the one that employed her.

Only as I read further I found she wasn't becoming anything of the kind. She was doing the job that had been given her, and promising Jimmy that after it was done she would resign from the spy service and go with him to Argentina or some other place where he could change his name.

It seems—though his letter was far from clear in places—that she had readily confessed to him that she was the spy of a foreign agent with headquarters in New York, and that she had been sent to induce him to steal this particular plan. She claimed not to know who the real head of the spy system was and that she always received her orders by mail or through a third party; that the "Big Chief" as she called him was known personally to only a very few, but he was known to all who worked for him as ruthless and unforgiving. When his spies failed, unless they had been proved by many successes to be unusually astute, they usually disappeared and were heard of no more.

Such disappearances, she said, inevitably attended any slips made by the women he employed. It was dangerous to fail; but it was fatal to make a mistake. I fancied that the Chief, having had much experience with the duplicity of female agents, had discovered that only so drastic an alternative could keep them from occasionally giving him the double-cross.

She had met Jimmy and loved him—so she said. And he loved her. There was no question of that. She told him that if he would get the plan and sell it she would have succeeded, and that she could resign from the spy service and he could resign from the naval service, and with the money they could go to South America and be happy ever afterward.

There is no question in my mind but that he was crazy over her. I mean crazy in the sense that the alienists use it. He, a graduate of Annapolis, as fine a boy as ever lifted his hand to a vizor before the Flag, stole that plan, had put it into a suit-case some days before with letters and things, and expressed it to New York.

But before that he had given her the note saying he had the plan and would sell it. She said she needed it to show that she had got him to steal the plan. Then she came to New York and through her an appointment had been made to meet an agent at the Blackmore. It wasn't exactly an appointment: he was instructed to arrive on a certain day and register at the Blackmore and wait until he was approached by some one who would appear within three days and give him the money and take the blue-print.

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She also had promised to meet him soon after his arrival. I was hoping she wouldn't try to keep that promise.

She had warned him, however, that he would not only be watched closely to make sure that he was not in league with any of the Federal Secret Service men, but that desperate efforts would be made to steal the plan so that the sum of money would not have to be paid.

I had already found out that they were trying to run in a "cold" deck on Jimmy. Furthermore, she had insisted—and on this point Jimmy had almost punctured the paper with heavy underscoring—that he keep the plan where he could lay hands on it any minute, because, she had said, if he was approached and offered the specified sum and didn't at once deliver the blueprint, they—whoever "they" were—would at once become suspicious and might even try to do away with him to make sure that there was no chance of his giving information to the Secret Service.

I suppose foreign spies in this country have to do things like that to keep their organization effective; but it looked to me as though the cards had been stacked against Jimmy so he didn't have a chance in the world.

It was really that note which she had got out of him that made the situation bad. She had no sooner left Washington to come to New York and make arrangements for the appointment than Jimmy came to his senses. Just as soon as the witch was out of sight the charm was broken. He saw clearly then that he was being the blackest kind of a traitor to his country. Such men as he don't make good traitors. But if he didn't become a traitor he knew very well that the note in which he had admitted stealing the plan and offering it for sale would be turned over to the Navy Department, and he could be cashiered and imprisoned and disgraced for life. So he was to be —— if he did and —— if he didn't. That being the situation, he turned to me.

Jimmy was a cousin of mine. He was one member of the family who didn't think I was a "black sheep" though he knew why I had taken the name "Everhard;" and no matter how incorrect his opinion on that point, it was an opinion that was very agreeable to me. All my relatives, and I at least, had one cherished idea in common. We thought there was nobody like Jimmy. We were proud of him. He had done some wonderful things, or we thought them wonderful; so as far as our admiration went it amounted to the same thing.

I am not as modest as I ought to be perhaps, and so from time to time when I saw Jimmy I was given to telling him of little episodes that I more or less deliberately got into; and I never discouraged him from thinking that I was something of a soldier of fortune, whereas I am nothing more than a professional gambler who sometimes goes out on the street and plays for stakes that can't be shoved back and forth across a green cloth.

So, as soon as this woman was out of sight and her spell was broken, Jimmy was horrified at the mess he was in. He would not become a traitor. He did not want his career ruined, not for himself alone, but for his family. At the last minute of the eleventh hour he turned to me with a special-delivery letter. He said he knew that I would do anything on earth to help him. And I would.

But there was something more yet than helping him. I am not what is called a "patriotic fellow." I never yell when the band plays "Dixie," or stand three hours on the edge of the sidewalk in the sun watching the soldiers march by. I suppose I have complained a little that I didn't know what this country was coming to when a reform régime got in so that it was impossible to get police protection for a quiet little game of cards. But I never see the old Flag streaming and whipping in the breeze like a live thing tugging at its pole without understanding why men proudly march beneath it and are ready to go out and die under it without flinching.

I never hear a poorly informed but inevitably vehement man on a soap-box at the street corner haranguing—far too often in broken English—against the Government and Flag, but I feel sure that if he knew a little more about the old Flag and what it really stands for he, too, would be ready and proud to carry it forward over a shot-swept field. Nobody wants to die or even fight for a politician. But politicians don't own the Government. They just make workingmen who haven't much time to read and think believe they do. Besides, a man doesn't have to love a politician to be patriotic.

I would have done anything for Jimmy;

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but when added to that I was also being given the chance of a lifetime to make trouble for foreign spies who just about had their fingers on what was perhaps the most precious plan of the Navy Department, I was quite determined to go the limit.

I never hurt anybody if I can help it. But sometimes somebody gets in my way when I have decided to do certain things, and then I always wonder afterward if I could have done just as well and have been a little more gentle. I was very much afraid that some of these foreign spies might be as clever as they are in the stories I have read about them; in which case I decided that I would have to bribe all the handwriting experts in the country to swear that the note he gave that woman wasn't his at all. I didn't care how clever and dangerous and suspicious they were. I knew that somebody's soul would be kicking its heels at Heaven if he or she—that woman bothered me—made further trouble for Jimmy.

It was certain nobody was going to get that blue-print, no matter how desperate and suspicious became the Big Chief—who, I thought likely would answer "Here" if somebody called "Mr. Goss"—because I would not be able to produce it on demand.

I was afraid they might do a more thorough job in searching my room next time. I was timid about the hotel safe. If Mr. Goss had not got its combination in three years he was a poor spy. I was afraid to carry it with me lest I meet with an accident on the street or have my pocket picked in the hotel. But I had taken such precautions as allowed me to be almost at my ease while I permitted Mr. Goss to entertain me, much of the time privately; and I felt confident that, if he were who I thought, he would be careful not to make any move that might cause complications and attract attention to himself. If he wouldn't let his own confidential agent, such as Helen was, know his identity I figured that—if he were the Big Chief, or closely associated with him—he wouldn't do anything indiscreet in my presence. But having a very cautious nature I declined to let him pass behind me, to drink with him, or to have the blue-print where he could get his fingers on it though he poked a gun under my nose or walloped me with a billy.

That morning while everybody had been questioning the clerk and trying to find where the card with Mr. Goss's name on it had gone to, I dropped an envelop addressed to J. J. Jrksolt, General Delivery, into the mail-box. I chose such an impossible name because I didn't want to take a chance that J. J. Jones or P. J. Smith would get it by accident. In the upper left-hand corner I had written "Return in 10 days to Navy Department, Washington, D. C." I wanted to make sure that it would get back into proper hands if I would not be able to call for it within ten days. And I had not addressed it to myself because I didn't want to leave any clue that would connect the blue-print with me if it did go back to the Navy Department and pass on into the hands of the Secret Service.

I would have had a fine time of it trying to explain to some of those quiet lynx-eyed men, who don't think it necessary to use a publicity agent in their work, that I came by that blue-print honestly. I never take any chances that I can evade.

So after I left Mr. Goss in the evening I wasn't much afraid of the consequences of any "accident" I might have on the street. But as usual, I was cautious.

I walked around and around, jumped on a car and jumped off to take another going the other way. I got off that and dived into the subway. Then I got off at the next station and took a taxi to my own apartment.

I didn't stay long. But when I came down, the pockets of my coat were heavy. A little automatic at close range—if one is foresighted enough to cut a nick in the soft nose of its bullets—will do just about as effective work as a big one. But it is the big-mouthed fellows that have the most moral persuasion.

A bold man can sometimes feel inclined to duck and rush in if he faces a small caliber; but I have never yet seen a man who wouldn't sit up and look respectful if a .38 was close enough to make him fancy that he felt its breath. I had two of them, one for each hand, and neither hand ever trembled when I had a .38 in it for ballast.

I changed taxis three times on my return to the hotel so it wouldn't be easy for anybody who happened to feel interested to trace me back to my apartment and true name simply by asking the chauffeur where he had picked me up.

It was almost midnight when I came in; but there were yet so many men in the lobby that I couldn't tell which of them

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were watching me. My nerves perhaps were a bit on edge, so I fancied they all were. I decided that I would make sure and walked in and sat down.

It may have been my nerves, though they don't often play me tricks, but I soon was convinced that three different men had me spotted. I could tell some of the time that they were looking at me out of the corners of their eyes, and when I looked up they would be staring into space as if they didn't know I was on earth.

But once I caught the eye of a fellow in a brown derby. I knew just as quick as I caught the impact of his cold eyes that it would be lots more comfortable to have him on my side than on the other. His face was clean-cut and hard. There wasn't a soft line in it. He was seated in a deep leather chair some twenty feet away with a cigar in his hand. He didn't glance away when our eyes met; and I held his gaze.

We looked steadily at each other for several moments. I had the feeling that he wanted to make me nervous. He did. But I would have been there yet if he had not moved his eyes first. He casually looked at his cigar, got up and walked out.

"I hope we don't meet again," was the telepathic message I sent after him. I tried for some minutes, but I couldn't catch the eyes of any one else who seemed unduly interested in me, so I went up to my room.

As soon as I put the key in my door I knew some one had already entered it before me. It was unlocked. I distinctly remembered locking it. I had shut and bolted the windows and drawn the blinds, too, and locked the door. I always keep the blinds down. I dislike the sensation that some one may be peering through from across the way. For all I knew, the person was on the inside waiting for me with a club. I have been waited for once or twice.

When you know some one is already in your room it is not wise to press on the light as most people do. The fellow on the inside has all the advantage. Also, a characteristic that people have who wait for you is the desire to stand behind the door as you open it.

I whistled softly and cheerfully to encourage whoever might be on the inside while I fumbled with the key. I really didn't think there was any one in there, but I am not ashamed to be cautious. I never blush after I look under the bed.

I opened the door just barely wide enough for me to slip through. Then I stepped inside with an automatic in each hand. It was dark as a cloudy midnight. I was no sooner inside than I felt a presence; or it may have been that I heard the faintest of movements. A moment of silence—then a voice, the most disconcerting voice I have ever heard, spoke.

"Hello, Jimmy!" she said cheerfully.

The voice came from across the room by the bed.

I said nothing.

"Jimmy!" There was a trace of alarm.

I was still silent.

"Jimmy! Why don't you speak? What's the matter?"

I reached out with my foot and closed the door.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

I said nothing. I know of no easier way to make other people uncomfortable than to keep silent. I didn't know of any other way to make her uncomfortable.

"Jimmy, don't tease me!"

Her voice was like pleading music. I stood rigid against the wall, peering into the darkness. I thought of dashing out of the door and holding it until the house detective could be called. For a moment that appealed to me as a good way to get rid of her.

I thought that something very much against my grain would have to be done with her sooner or later, for as soon as she saw my face or heard my voice she would know that I was not J. J. Spearman. No doubt then she would scream. That's the way they do.

"Mr. Dietz?"

She barely whispered it. But it was more than I could put on to a page. It was a confidential question and at the same time assurance. It said: "I thought you were Jimmy at first, but I am not surprised to see you, and you understand why I am here, so we might as well end this silence and get busy on our plans."

That gave me an opportunity. I didn't lose any time in grabbing it by the fore-lock.

"Mr. Dietz couldn't come," I said quietly, then turned on the light.

I KNEW she was beautiful, but I hadn't expected the mother of the sirens herself. She was on the other side of the room and stood tense, drawn

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back slightly as if to spring. In her hand by her side, but leveled at me, was a small revolver.

She had taken her hat off and it was on the bed where evidently she had been lying. The heavy mass of black hair was drawn back, down over the top of her ears, and framed a face of perfect features, beautiful and strong. Her dark eyes were aglow and slightly contracted. She was alert but unafraid.

I didn't know just what to do, but I thought it best to appear at ease. I slipped both automatics into my pockets and calmly sat down, saying—

"I didn't know who you were at first."

She, too, appeared relieved but somewhat suspicious. She slipped the revolver into a pocket of her skirt and eying me closely came a step or two nearer.

"These lights—Mr. Spearman may come. Hadn't we better turn them off? Hadn't we better go?" she asked.

"No danger. He won't come for a while yet. Have you searched the room?"

"I'm not a sneak-thief," she answered with asperity.

"No," I agreed satirically. "You're not a *sneak*-thief."

I have never seen a face or heard a voice so expressive. I felt that she could act any rôle and that she was acting every moment. So I wasn't sure whether the trace of a startled look that flashed into her eyes and passed was for my benefit.

I was once told by a man who had had much experience himself that I was the only person he had ever met who understood women perfectly. He said, "You don't trust any of them at any time." I had known very well before I saw her that she was dangerous and clever; but seeing her, I knew that she was worse than that. Most women are merely wily. She was brainy.

"Why couldn't Mr. Dietz come?" she asked, coming a little closer, but still keeping a good distance between us.

"You had better ask him. He told me just before I came up that he wasn't coming. He looked through here last night and again today. He said they were going to pay the money, then——"

"Well?"

"You know. Get it some way. Legitimately, if possible."

I merely said "legitimately" but I made of it a satirical question.

"Yes. He asked me this afternoon if Mr. Spearman ever gambled," she said.

"Does he?"

"He's an American officer, isn't he? Did you ever know an educated American that doesn't play poker?"

Just as I expected, she got on to my weakness the first shot. Jimmy did play poker. And he played it wretchedly.

"So it's to be a quiet little game of cards?"

"He won't know that it is any of us that trimmed him," she flashed.

"I see. And he will continue to feel grateful for the handsome price paid to him."

This time there was no mistaking the surprised look. It stayed on her face while she asked—

"Do *you* know?"

But even at that it's not difficult to simulate surprise.

I smiled knowingly and nodded.

She appeared incredulous. She appeared incredulous so well that I thought perhaps it would be best to reassure her.

"Yes. You have done clever work in getting that plan. But it was rather stupid of you not to make him give it to you instead of having to make the appointment."

She half turned away and shrugged her shoulders. I had the impression that she averted her face to keep me from seeing what she feared her art could not conceal.

"Why didn't you do it?" I pressed.

"If you know that much, you know the report I sent in," she said challengingly.

"Do you think that really explained?" I asked as challengingly.

"Well, if he wouldn't give it to me what could I do? Didn't I go there and get the ablest and most trusted engineer of the service to steal the plan and come to New York with it to keep the appointment? What more do you want?"

I had to watch myself to keep from visibly swelling with pride when I heard her call Jimmy the "ablest and most trusted engineer of the service." She had got onto another of my weaknesses. But I wasn't satisfied.

"I don't see why you didn't get the blueprint. You got that note out of him."

She was tense in an instant, her eyes straining against my own, and she spoke in a low awed tone—

"Who are you anyway?"

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I said nothing but continued to look inscrutably into her eyes.

"You are—you are—" She hesitated, and almost fearfully whispered, "the Big Chief?"

I said nothing. But my face, too, was tense and my eyes narrowed. I knew if I didn't speak that she would. I was afraid she would tell me nothing if I talked.

"You—you must be," she went on as if arguing with herself. "I sent it to your private box. I have told no one. Not a soul. You are——"

"Who?" I asked, as if I had not caught the name.

"I don't know. You know I don't. How could I?"

I began to think she wasn't such a good actress after all. She was having all she could do to keep from showing nervous excitement. It was quite obvious that she was dreadfully impressed by the thought that she stood in the presence of the man who controlled the daring and ruthless organization of spies secretly burrowing under the very foundations of the United States. It pays to bluff. At least there is a lot of satisfaction in it till the show-down.

I cast around in my mind for something to talk about that would, if possible, keep her disconcerted. She was agitated as it was, and that was quite pleasing; but I wanted to keep her as much flurried as I could. Besides, if I couldn't find out things from her as the Big Chief I didn't see how I would ever get them from her as an impostor under the name of J. J. Spearman.

"So Dietz has been telling you about the little plan to get back our money."

"No, no. He told me nothing. He just asked me if Mr. Spearman played poker. And I understood. I know you have terrific expenses to meet and that it would mean much to get back that $30,000—and the submarine plan too."

"You don't think that he is playing his game with the Secret Service?"

The question seemed to touch a dynamic emotion.

"No, no, no!" she denied agitatedly. "Not in the world. How can you think of such a thing? He wouldn't dare mention it to any one—he stole the plan."

"But he wouldn't give it to you," I persisted.

"He wouldn't trust me."

"But he loved you."

She blushed. She actually blushed. I thought that fine acting; and particularly fine was the hesitating way she asked—

"How do you know?"

I looked at her steadily for some moments before answering, then said as cynically as I could say it:

"I suppose you just walked up to him in a business-like manner and said, 'Look here, Jimmy Spearman, steal that plan for me and I'll see that you get $30,000 for it.' It's pretty plain how you got him to steal that plan when you come into his room in this hotel and make yourself at home—past midnight."

The blush had deepened into anger and she spoke rapidly and cuttingly:

"Did you hire me for my morals? You don't care what I do or how I do it. Results—results—that's all you want. And if I don't get them—what? You have stayed in the background for over two years watching me, seeing every move I made, testing me out. At last you gave me a big and desperate commission. I got it. Why shouldn't I come to his room at midnight if I want to? As long as you get the plan—what else matters?"

It was impressive, but it didn't ring true. The few moments before she had not been acting. Now she was. I was sure of it. I was much puzzled. What she said was plausible enough; but if she were the kind of a woman she was pretending to be she wouldn't be defending herself as she did. If she had merely tipped me a wink and a knowing smile when I spoke of making herself at home in his room she would have been convincing.

Women are always awkward when they try to appear sinful. It is when they simulate virtue that they most artfully hoodwink malekind. Perhaps it's because they practise it more. She went on:

"I had to make him make love to me—no matter how I hated it. And I did hate it. I loathed it. Night after night I heard his passionate words and, while I was desperate to stop his mouth, I encouraged him to further madness. You—you sitting back in the shadows and knowing me only as a number, as No. B 52, kept urging me to haste and warning me of what failure would mean. I had to make him love me!"

And there I was, trying to make her disconcerted and getting disconcerted myself. It made me angry to hear her speak

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cold-bloodedly of the way she had torn Jimmy's heart and manhood to pieces. Saying she was "desperate to stop his mouth" sounded as if Jimmy had just weakly tumbled all over himself to make love to her at the first opportunity without encouragement from her. And yet, if it was such a one-sided affair, and she had played a hateful part to deepen his folly, why, I asked her, was she now in his room waiting patiently for him?

I thought her answer rather weak. It was that she had thought it best to keep up the part until the deal had been completed.

"So then," I snapped at her, "you'll not resign from the spy service and flee with him to South America!"

I have seen women who could shoot straight, but I have never seen one who could draw quick. I had no idea that my few words about South America would act like a bomb explosion within her veins.

For one instant on her face there was an expression of anguished astonishment, and the next instant I had sprung forward and roughly twisted the little revolver from her hand. She drew back from me breathless and stood panting, but her face was defiant.

"What is the occasion for all the excitement?" I asked her with exaggerated unconcern as I broke the revolver and extracted the shells, then tossed it carelessly onto the table. But inside of my head was buzzing the wish that some one of these men who think they do understand women were in my place.

She was showing to me more of the demon than the siren nature. In the final analysis they both amount to the same thing. I had got, 'way past the point when I could even have an opinion on whether or not she was acting. But I had some satisfaction from the reflection that if she was acting she would soon take some other cue, and if she wasn't she was more flustered than I. The last wasn't much of a consolation though. I knew how badly I was flustered, even if my studious calm—a calm that I have solicitously cultivated for just such emergencies—did somewhat conceal it from her.

I couldn't imagine what on earth I was to do with her. Once outside of that room she would inevitably discover that I was literally a double-dyed impostor, neither Spearman nor her chief. I didn't want to truss her up and stow her in the bathroom and keep her there until the game was over, but I was beginning to wonder what else could be done. If she had been fluffy and coquettish it would have been easier; if she had been plainly of that type which most men know to their sorrow, I could have done it cheerfully. But there was something splendid about her as she stood there, her beauty heightened by emotion. And though she was plainly bewildered, she was unafraid. She looked at me much as one looks at something which the eyes see and the brain discredits.

"How did you know that?"

It wasn't a question. It was a command to tell her. Her voice was low and tense. It threatened and at the same time implored.

I moved closer to her. I was entirely willing to tell her. I was ready to tell her everything. In fact I wanted her to know, so that she would have something to meditate upon during the long and lonesome hours while bound and gagged in the bathroom. I wanted her to know that Jimmy Spearman was not a traitor; that she or no other woman could make one of him.

So I moved closer and stood near enough to reach her with one jump. I knew that when I jumped, one hand would go over her mouth and an arm would go around her neck. I had no reason to care if she had strength and fought fiercely. I knew what I was about.

I began by speaking soothingly to her.

"You won't need to display any hysteria and it's best for you to keep in mind that I have a gun in each pocket, and, while I have never yet shot a woman, I've often thought there must be something attractive about it—so many men do it. Especially after they marry 'em."

I don't believe that she ever had anybody talk to her like that before. She appeared not to understand what I meant. I suppose if I had flourished a gun, rolled my eyes and yelled at her that she would have been impressed. It's hard to make some women believe you are in earnest any other way. I was in earnest, but I didn't yell or roll my eyes. I said quietly:

"Now you listen and don't make a fuss. It will be very disagreeable if you do. But Jimmy has given you the double-cross. Not you nor all the gold nor all the women of Europe can make a traitor of him. He

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wouldn't sell or give you — — spies a postage-stamp. You're easy. He was just leading you on all the time— What on earth——?"

There is absolutely no telling what a woman will do next. I had expected to face a display of temper. I always thought it made a woman indignant to find that she wasn't the only one who could do the flim-flamming in a game of love. But she went pale suddenly, put her hands to her throat, reeled and fainted.

I let her faint. I didn't catch her in my arms or anything like that. But I didn't see what she was going to gain by it.

If I had rushed in and caught her then she might have picked a gun from my pocket while I was rubbing her brow or carrying her to the bed. But I didn't interfere. In fact I watched her closely and thought she did it very well; but I wouldn't have fallen to the floor as hard as she did to fool anybody.

But, as she lay there without moving and her face stayed white, I began to wonder if I hadn't made a mistake. She had real cause for toppling over that way if what I had heard about the Big Chief was true and she had bungled the job with Jimmy as I told her. Besides, she seemed to think I was the Big Chief.

For a moment, maybe longer, I felt sorry for her. It wasn't out of any kindness of my heart. It was because of her beautiful, pale face that seemed strangely ethereal, refined, delicate. All faces are beautiful in death or a faint. They are cold and white and like the priceless vellum from which monks of long ago patiently erased the worldly odes of Anacreon and then set down their simple prayers. A face from which the hot, worldly blood has flowed leaves the soul naked. Sometimes I am sure there are no evil souls; that the worst of them is only masked in the flesh by hot, eager, reckless blood.

I had no fear that she was dead; but I was fascinated, strangely influenced—faintly touched with awe, perhaps—to stand like an intruder staring down at the face from which every vestige of passion and art had been stripped.

For one of the few times in my life my cherished cynicism toward women left me. She had tried shamelessly, and it was yet to be seen if not with success, to destroy the self-respect of the man who meant more to me than any other man or woman, to make of him the most abased thing a man can become—a traitor. But I wondered what sword-pointed influence had driven her into the rôle. Shameless women do not faint.

I DRENCHED a towel with cold water and wiped her face, chafed her hands, and worked for some minutes before she stirred and the blood crept almost timidly back into her face. Presently she opened her eyes, looked vacantly at me, and closed them again. I put pillows under her head, stepped back and waited.

She opened her eyes again and stared at me, but I could tell that her brain was actively at work; and that when she shut them this time she did so because she wanted to think.

In some way I had lost the desire to torture her, to cut her with words. I wasn't anxious to trust her, and didn't intend to. But I thought perhaps when she knew that she had failed to make a traitor of Jimmy, and knew her career as No. B 52 was probably over and that it would be hard to explain to the Chief, that then she might give me a little useful information. I certainly needed it. I didn't know what I could offer in return, but I supposed she might think of something.

"You have greatly misunderstood the situation," I said.

It may have been the friendliness in my voice that surprised her. She opened her eyes and kept them open, lying motionless and watching me intently as I continued.

"I am not connected with your spy organization in any way, though I expect to familiarize myself with it a little before I get through."

Her eyes widened perceptibly, but there was no other sign of surprise.

"I have taken Jimmy's name and place here. Not even you could make him come. And as for the plan—well, nobody will get that. But that note he gave you—I am after it. Unless I get that note his life is ruined. I will make it worth your while if you give it to me."

"I can't," she said weakly. "I sent it in. He has it—and I honestly do not know who he is."

I knew that she meant the Chief.

I asked how and to whom she sent it.

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She said it went to a post-office box, then explained that I was wrong in thinking his identity could be traced from there because the mail was taken out by a man who in some way passed it to somebody else and all effort to find where it went to ultimately would be without success.

She said it would be easy enough to catch whoever took the mail from the box, but the next day the box number could be changed, somebody else could call for it, and eventually he could be caught. That could go on indefinitely, but the man behind the system would still be unknown because all attempts to find when the messenger passed the letters to some one else would be futile.

"How do you know?" I asked significantly.

"That is well known. Mr. Dietz told me. Other members of the organization know it, too."

"Did you ever hear of a Mr. Goss?"

"No."

I didn't know whether or not to believe her.

"Mr. Dietz doesn't tell you everything then?" I asked.

"No, hardly." She smiled a little, as if the question was preposterous.

"He didn't tell you that after he left my room last night he went to Mr. Goss's?"

"No. Not that. But you got him into trouble. He didn't say what. But he was very angry. I thought Jimmy did it." She added curiously: "Mr. Dietz is afraid of you. He didn't say it, but I could see he was. I didn't understand how any one—or at least a man like Dietz—would be afraid of Jimmy. But you——"

"What?"

"You are not like Jimmy. I'm all right now. I think I'll sit in a chair, if you don't object."

I didn't offer to help her up. She didn't need help. She sat in a chair by the table and leaned on it with her elbows, watching me steadily and a bit suspiciously.

"Why did you make a fool of Jimmy—or try to? What was back of that?" I asked.

"Money, of course." She tried to say it carelessly.

My answer was not polite. It was to the point. I said:

"Oh, ——! If your Chief is willing to ring in a tin-horn gambler to trim a naval officer of the $30,000 paid for the most valuable blue-print in the Navy Department, he is not going to pay you any seductive sum. Besides, you run the danger of falling down on the job. Does he pay for mistakes? No. You do. And as for money— Look here, young woman, you know that I know you know that with your beauty and brains you can get all the money you want out of any number of gilded youths by making love one-tenth as hard to them as you did to a poor devil of a naval officer. Now talk sense. Why did you do it?"

She looked hard at me. There was fire in her eyes, but her voice was low as she said—

"For my country!"

I mentally retracted all I had thought about her poor acting. The way she said that was almost convincing. It was just as if she meant every simple word.

"Bah! You look like a German, don't you!" I snapped brutally.

I felt a flush of indignation that she would think I was so gullible as that. To use a very expressive phrase, it gets my goat to have people take me for a simpleton. I have been fooled, cheated, hoodwinked and bilked; but never by anybody who took me for an easy mark.

"How do you know they are Germans?" she asked quickly, surprised.

"Mr. Dietz didn't tell you about the little conversation we had last night, then? He didn't know that I followed him down to the second floor and listened to an excited conversation behind the door of the room he entered. You knew they were Germans, didn't you? Then why do you think I would be such a blockhead as not to find it out? Now, since it was neither money nor country that made you torment Jimmy, what was it?"

"Are you—you a local S. S. man?" she asked.

"Who is he?"

"You know what I mean. Secret Service. You are!"

"Not the kind you mean. I'm a friend of Jimmy's. A little more than a friend. When you left Washington your magic charm that had numbed his brains was broken. He wrote me everything, gave me the checks to his baggage, and I came here to keep his appointment. But the blue-print will not be produced on demand. I may produce something else—one in each hand—but no

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plans of my country will ever go from my hand into the fingers of a foreign spy. No, not though he brings over a gold-mine and offers to put it in my back yard.

"And, Miss Helen, whatever your name is, now that I have made myself plain I would like to have you talk a while and talk without the use of question marks. I'm in a tight place. You are keeping me company. You've fallen down on your job, but I've got a little more time to play yet; and there is going to be an awful rumpus raised around this hotel if I catch anybody cheating."

She seemed about to speak, but didn't for some time. I waited patiently. Knowing how to wait has much to do with getting things one wants.

Her voice was low and strained when she did speak. I like women to speak in a low voice. I can't endure sopranos, especially when they are excited. She had a soft contralto voice, and seemed painfully in earnest as she asked—

"Will you tell me one thing?"

"If I think it is any of your business."

I wasn't very polite. But why should I have been? The minute you begin being polite to a woman who is trying to get the best of you, you bring out the white flag and get ready to run it up.

"Yes. It is my business—not business, either. But something I believe I have a right to know. It means much to me to know. Honestly, did Jimmy tell you that he was fooling me all the time? That he wasn't sincere with me?"

I thought it over while she waited with wide, anxious eyes—or she seemed to be anxious. I can't always be sure about women's eyes; that is, I can't be sure very often.

When I have occasion to tell a lie, I do like most other men and tell it; tell it so it is convincing, too. But a lie is always a sign of weakness. It is a mask, usually, to hide a flaw. And while I thought it would be rather neat revenge to make her think that instead of hoodwinking Jimmy he had only played with her, yet I didn't like to do it. She had a sense of shame. She had defended herself with mock brazenness about being in his room; she had fainted when I jeered at what I thought was the faithless way she encouraged his love and how she had failed in making of him a traitor.

The trouble with some women who dip into wickedness is that they have never really been loved. I thought it might do her good to know that she had been. I don't mean by that to do her soul good, but I thought if she really knew what she had done, she might not be so eager next time to get some fine honest fellow infatuated with her and then try to make of him something despicable, something of which even she would be ashamed—a traitor.

So I told her with unornate but blazing words just how Jimmy had written to me, that he thought she was the most beautiful creature God ever made; that he thought her true and faithful; that he thought she, too, for his sake was playing traitor to her trust.

The words seemed to go home. She pressed her lips tightly and tears stood in her eyes. But she could put almost any expression she wanted into those dark eyes, so I tried not to be impressed.

"You are a friend of his?" she asked tenderly.

I steeled myself. There is a difference between a low and a soft voice. She was speaking softly. I nodded.

"I am taking a desperate chance," she went on, "but I will trust you. You must trust me, too. We can help each other—and Jimmy. I do love him. I love him more than all the world. I came here tonight and sneaked into his room like a—like a woman of that kind to wait for him because I wanted to save him."

"From what?" I asked coldly.

I didn't seem much impressed, but it took some effort on my part to seem that way. I began to understand something of how she had warped and wheedled and twisted Jimmy.

"From being a traitor to his country!"

"Forget it!" I answered insultingly. I wasn't going to let her hoodwink me as easy as that.

"You don't trust me. No. And I don't blame you. Perhaps you will never know just how desperate for love of him and for his honor I was when I bribed the chambermaid of her pass-key and came in here. I was tired. I lay down and waited. I waited for hours. I wanted to talk to him. It was hard enough while I was in Washington. My nights were sleepless there for shame of what I was doing. But since I came here it has been unbearable. To New

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York, I mean. To save him I have become myself a traitor! And," she added weakly, breaking into a sob and hiding her face, "too late—I fear."

I sat still and tried to look calm. Anybody knows that it is not what people say, but it is the way they say it, that reaches back into the mind and pushes one's judgment off its seat. Mine wasn't pushed off yet, but it was having to hold on with both hands. I was doing my best not to believe her, and a tormenting imp had me by the ear and was whispering: "Perhaps she is telling the truth, and she can help you. Perhaps she is telling the truth—and you need help. Perhaps she is telling the truth—and there is nobody else who can help you." But I brushed that imp away and thought hard while she bent her head and cried softly.

I decided it best to talk a little more before I made known what attitude I would take; though I had already thought to placate both the imp and my judgment by pretending to believe her. If she wanted to help me, it would be all right. But if I got suspicious, there still remained the bathroom in which to lock her. I told her that when she had cried all she felt like we would continue the conversation, and that I had some questions yet unasked.

She raised her face and looked squarely at me. She wasn't ashamed to show her red eyes or stained face. But then, there was very little coquettish about her anyway. She wasn't the kind of a woman that has to be to wind men around her finger.

"I want to know how you expect, or expected, to save him?"

"By making him see what an awful thing he was doing," she replied.

"That's a pretty and pious way of putting it, but Jimmy and I have both seen that for very nearly forty-eight hours, and I don't feel like he was anywhere near saved yet."

"Can't you understand," she asked pleadingly, "that it means—oh it means more than I can tell, just to know that Jimmy's honor can't be broken. I am proud of him for not coming. Can't you understand?"

"Not a bit. I feel that way about it—but I don't see how you have any claim to pride in the matter. Besides, unless something is done it will be just about as bad for him as if he had gone through with it. What did you plan to do?"

She whispered it as if afraid some one would hear:

"That note I sent in. We must get that."

"You are doing fine. Go on. How are we to get it?"

"I don't know. I think——"

"You think what?"

"I think after you give over that blueprint that we may be able to follow the man to whom you give it. He won't dare keep it long. The Chief is desperately anxious to get his hands on it. If we can watch, or get somebody—private detective or something—we may find out where it goes to. When we know that we may possibly find his room and search it. It's a chance, but——"

"No good," I said flatly. "I've already put that plan where no foreign agent can get it—not even with a gun at my head."

She raised out of her chair in alarm and said rapidly:

"You must—you must give it to him. You simply must. There is no other way. Oh, you don't understand! It has to be done. Oh, what have you done with it?"

"Young woman, you very nearly had me duped. I was just about ready to begin to believe you. You don't want Jimmy to be a traitor—want to preserve his honor and all that—but you want your Chief to get that blue-print. No! Not even to save Jimmy. Maybe it is your country that you are working for, but I want you to know, and when you meet your Big Chief you can tell him, if I don't get the chance first, that there are Americans, and lots of them, too, who will not sell their country to keep themselves or those whom they love from shame!"

It seemed as if that woman never would get through surprising me. Instead of being abashed or angry, her face was radiant. She looked as if she wanted to throw her arms about my neck. Her lips were parted, her eyes were bright and her hands were clenched as she leaned forward to listen. That's just the way with women, I thought, as I held myself in from showing surprise at her attitude. You never can outguess them.

"I could love you for that!" she said impulsively.

"No doubt," I said, narrowing my eyes and speaking deliberately. "You seem able to love anybody that you want to dupe."

She gave a smothered cry as if I had

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struck her and sank back, looking at me with sad, reproachful gaze. I didn't feel sorry I had insulted her. I wouldn't have felt sorry for anything: She deserved it. Only, I wished she wouldn't look at me that way.

It was nearer dawn than midnight, and I hadn't had much sleep the night before, either. But that woman and I had been fighting a duel of wits for two hours, and I wasn't any better off than when I had switched on the lights.

I looked toward the bed, not with the thought of getting into it, but because I thought soon I would be using a sheet torn into strips to bind her with. There seemed nothing else to do but to put her out of the way and go through with the game alone.

I worked my fingers and shook my arms to limber up the muscles a bit and casually took a step nearer her chair. I didn't want to do it, so when she began talking again I sat down on the edge of the table glad of an excuse for delay.

All that she had said before was commonplace to the amazing statements that now came. There was nothing theatrical about her words or her manner as she again leaned forward and, with her elbows on the table, said simply:

"I am giving the Big Chief what you call the double-cross. I am practically putting my life in your hands by telling this. But I am going to trust you. You will have to trust me a little. I am not afraid to trust you—not now. I can't explain in detail, for it would take hours. But if I don't make myself clear you can ask questions.

"You simply must get that blue-print and turn it over to the man who offers you the money for it. No, no, don't look that way. Listen: That blue-print is not the one Jimmy took for me. It is valueless, though I have risked my life by putting on it 'O. K. B 52.' The man who will take it from you won't know the difference. He will look for only my mark—that's his guarantee. The Chief is the engineer. He can tell at a glance——"

"If that is so," I interrupted quickly, "then why not let them go to the devil with their $30,000 and trade the blue-print for the note Jimmy gave you! That would be simple. If they have the print—or think they have it—they won't longer want the note for a club over him."

"No. No. Listen to me. You will probably think I sold out the Big Chief. In a way I did. I have tipped off the Secret Service that this blue-print which J. J. Spearman is to turn over to the Big Chief's agent is not genuine, but it will be passed on to the Chief as if it were. The Secret Service has been after him for months. They can catch his agents but they can't catch him. I know and they know very well that the agent who gets the blue-print you must give him will be in haste to turn it over to the Big Chief. There are Secret Service men all over this hotel watching you. I came here to see Jimmy and tell him —he doesn't know. I couldn't stand it any longer."

"But the original plan—he stole that?"

"He did. He gave it to me. I switched blue-prints on him, and the original is where nobody can get it. You see," she smiled, "perhaps I can in time sell it back to your Government for a big sum—if I want to."

"But why did you make Jimmy write that note?"

"I had to. The Chief wouldn't have believed me otherwise—he's that suspicious. I am sure he compared that note with an authentic specimen of Jimmy's handwriting. I had to do it. There was no other way. Don't you see there wasn't."

"So you are trying to get in with the Chief and the Secret Service at the same time. Play both sides. I knew you were a brainy woman."

"Thank you." She said it as if it were a compliment that really pleased her.

"But I love Jimmy. I do. I will go with him to South America or anywhere else. I don't care what people think of my honor or my reputation so much as I want them to think well of his. And most of all I want him to keep his own self-respect. I told the Secret Service operatives that Mr. Spearman was helping me in the effort to thus catch the Big Chief. I lied. I was protecting Jimmy when I knew I had made a traitor of him. I came here to tell him the truth if necessary—to show him that I loved him more than money, more than the country that hires me."

"What did you expect to do about that note?"

"If the Secret Service located the Chief and found it among his papers I would have told them that Jimmy wrote it to help me out. I would have made him say it, too

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—if I could. Oh, you don't know what I have suffered!"

"Well," I said, rather amused, "I'd think anybody who was trying to play a hand in so many pots at once would suffer some. Quite a bit, in fact."

"You must get that blue-print. You must get it in the morning—early. I don't think you will get the money until evening. Dietz said they wanted to get it away from you, in a poker game or something. Let them win it quick and then you can go without trouble and get away."

I took a deep breath and looked at her out of the corners of my eyes when she thus casually suggested that I should let a couple of gentle crooks quickly relieve me of $30,000 at poker. The only way anybody could ever get money out of me at that game was by holding the best hands and holding them honestly. If there is any crooked work to be done I am competent to do it.

I spend my mornings practising little movements in which the hand is quicker than the eye, chiefly because I enjoy trimming tin-horn gamblers who think they are clever at cheating. A fellow is likely to get scorched if he fights the devil with fire, but if I didn't take it upon myself to cheat tin-horns when I spotted them they might get into their heads that dishonesty is the best policy. And he has to be a far better crook than I have met since I became of age who can scorch me at poker.

Of course, the best of the crooked gamblers never let anybody know it. They never get caught. So maybe some of the fellows who have beaten me were crooked after all. They might not have had the best hands, though, if I had got suspicious.

But I didn't have time to meditate long over the plan of *not* losing $30,000 quickly. I wanted to ask more questions. I wanted to know how it was that Jimmy could actually steal that plan, give it to her, and she could report to the Secret Service that he was going to turn over a phony plan to the foreign agent, and yet Jimmy would not know anything about the truth or the Secret Service would not be suspicious of him.

"They missed that plan in the Navy Department and raised a commotion, I guess, about ten minutes after it disappeared. Didn't they?"

"Indeed they did," she answered.

"Jimmy was among those it was possible to suspect, wasn't he?"

"About the first."

"Then why wasn't he suspected?"

"Because I turned the real blue-print over to the Secret Service—got money for it, of course. I told them that Jimmy was my assistant in helping me give the Chief the double-cross. Don't you suppose if I hadn't done that the Secret Service men would have watched him so closely he could never have expressed a suit-case to New York without they would have got into it in some way and seen what it contained?"

"Why didn't you tell Jimmy some of the truth instead of tormenting the life and honor out of him?" I demanded.

"I wanted to see if he loved me more than his country—if he would be a traitor. Thank God he wasn't!"

"That doesn't ring true. Frankly, I don't understand you. But I'll tell you what we'll do. I won't trust you out of my sight, now. I can't let you return to your own room. And since we have stayed a big part of the night in this room together I think we can remain the rest of it. It's not conventional, but I think it safe. You lie down over there on the bed, and I'll pull a chair up against the door and we'll get through what's left of the night as best we can. I'm a light sleeper myself, so don't do anything to make me nervous.

"In the morning we will go down to breakfast together. And since you seem to be on friendly terms with Secret Service men, you locate one—it will be easy, as you said the hotel was full of them—introduce me, let him show credentials. Then I may again begin to believe you. After I verify his credentials and make sure you haven't tricked me, then I will go after the blue-print. And you will go with me. And after I get that blue-print we will go to the office of some construction engineer and I will get him to look it over for me. If he says it is anything but the vital part of an engine or a submarine that he never knew of before, then I will believe you.

"After that you can go your own way—just as far as you like, too—and I will go back to the hotel, meet the agent whenever he feels like showing up and exchange a blue-print that I know to be worthless for $30,000. Then, so as not to run the risk of being held up, or knocked over the head, I will cheerfully get into the poker

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game your Chief has arranged. I would rather meet a crooked gambler than a strong-arm man, and I have no doubt but that your organization is pretty well supplied with both. That's the program for the remainder of the night and tomorrow. Is it agreeable to you?"

She looked at me curiously for some moments and seemed inclined to smile. It was no time for smiles. Perhaps she realized that, too. I was serious. She said with a sigh and rather wearily that it was about as agreeable as anything that might be expected, then walked to the bed, calmly took off her shoes, loosened a button here and there and dropped down.

She did it without any squeamishness or protestations. I liked that. These women who make a fuss over every little thing don't know how much respect men have for the calm and quiet few. Almost any other woman would have cried in horror to high Heaven that she couldn't think of lying down on a bed while a strange man remained in the room. Then, in a case like that, almost any other woman would have spent the night in the chaste sanctity of the bathtub, with a gag on her, and I would have occupied the bed.

As it was, I pulled a chair up to the door, to make sure no one could come in or go out. For, while I am a light sleeper, I had been long without much rest.

I had scarcely got settled before her deep and regular breathing indicated that she was already asleep. I made a slight noise to see if she was feigning, but not an eyelash quivered. She was really asleep. A few minutes later I was too. Which shows that I had begun to trust her.

I awoke first next morning; or rather I had slept in fits and starts and decided to stay awake before she had opened her eyes. It was eight or nine o'clock then; and she didn't appear to have moved during the night. I stared at her for a long time and wished that I could fix my conscience so it would never trouble me any more than that.

SHE sat up, rubbed her eyes and smiled.

"My, but I'm sleepy," she said.

"I don't see any reason why you should be."

She laughed. It was a soft, musical, cheery laugh. People who are good humored early in the morning, before they get a cocktail or something, are always disconcerting. It's not right that anybody should be cheerful before breakfast. I told her so, and she laughed again.

I liked to hear her laugh. Her hair was touseled and her clothes were awry, and she looked unwashed as even the prettiest woman does after a sleep, but she seemed irrepressible. She said she had had pleasant dreams. I said I was hungry.

She went into the bathroom and hummed and sang and splashed water. I waited and waited. It took her a long time, but she was worth waiting for. The clothes that she had slept in looked as if they were fresh from the tailor; her eyes were bright and merry, and the dark hair was again carefully framed about her face.

It made me a little suspicious to see her so cheerful—that is, seeing her so cheerful and kind of carelessly happy made me think that I ought to be suspicious that she had something scheduled to put over on me. But I couldn't be suspicious worth much of anything while she was smiling and even in a shy way trying to tease me. Time and again she said, "I'm happy—oh I'm happy!" And sometimes she would ask, "Aren't you?"

I said, not a bit; that I would be much more comfortable with a baby elephant on my hands than a young woman who was undeniably dangerous—if she chose to be. I asked her to be careful in her choice for at least twenty-four hours more.

She laughed again and looked at me in a curious way, but she wasn't in the least intimating that she was willing to flirt. I liked her for that.

Much against my reflective judgment, I was finding several things that I liked her for. If she had told me the truth, then with that erratic and incomprehensible way that most women have, she had protected Jimmy at the same time she had all but destroyed his honor and his career; and I was ready to give her credit for what devotion she had shown him, but I could never condone her unscrupulousness.

It was one thing for her to really love Jimmy and with desperate resourcefulness try to save him. It was another thing for her to be really worthy of the love of such a man as he; though I was much grieved and disappointed that even she could have so warped his sense of honor even for a mo-

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ment, and with a kind of fierce, unreasoning impulse I tried to put out of my mind the fact that he had for a moment been a traitor, and to remember only that he had been too much the man at the eleventh hour to debase himself. There is much disgrace in yielding if for only an instant to temptation; but there remains much to be proud of in fighting one's way back to honor.

Before we went down to breakfast together she explained that it would not be possible for her to introduce me personally to any member of the Secret Service.

"Some one of the Chief's agents might know him, and if I were seen talking to a Secret Service man, especially introducing you, my usefulness would be gone. I don't think the Secret Service men are known to any of those agents. The American Secret Service has few men in it who are not competent to keep their business and their identities secret. But a man cautious as you are must see that it would not be wise for me to take such a chance. Mr. Dietz might possibly know. He seems to know many things. I had a long talk with him last night. I had already notified them that I was to meet Jimmy here because, I said, I thought it best to continue to play my part with him until the blue-print had changed hands.

"They never dream that I really do love him. Mr. Dietz was on the watch for mē, and wanted to talk about you. He thinks you are Jimmy. He said that you had very nearly got him into trouble with the Big Chief himself, but didn't tell me what it was you had done and I didn't dare ask him. We don't dare ask questions. He was trying to convince himself that it was an accident. I didn't know what he meant but he said he was sure that he had not dropped anything in your room the night before."

I couldn't keep from smiling. Evidently I had got Dietz into hot water. I hoped that it was hot enough to blister him.

"You look positively impish," she said. "What did you do?"

I said I would tell her some time—maybe.

She went on:

"I have known for a long time that somebody was very close to the Big Chief, but I never knew his name, for sure. I am confident that Dietz is the lieutenant. For a moment I thought he might be the Big Chief himself, but I knew he wasn't after the way he talked about you. Dietz was almost ready to think that you weren't Jimmy. There are a lot of agents—of the Big Chief's agents—at Washington who know Mr. Spearman, but from the way Dietz talked I am the only one in New York who could identify him. Of course, I laughed and assured him that there could not possibly be any mistake about you being Jimmy. I didn't think there could be. He was reassured, but said most profanely in his broken English that that blankety-blank Yankee wasn't as stupid as I or the Big Chief thought. I'm simply dying with curiosity to know what you did to him."

"Nothing much. I'll tell you about it later."

"All right. I have grown used to waiting. Give me a piece of paper and I'll write you a note to—well, it will be a note to a man so high up in the Secret Service that he won't have any trouble in convincing you that he is to be trusted. Maybe that will convince you that I am to be trusted, too, at least for a little while. The funny part of it is that he knows Jimmy by sight. I can't imagine what sort of trouble you would have got into if you had tried to bluff it through as Jimmy Spearman. I expect your presence here under Jimmy's name has already agitated the Secret Service men."

She wrote a few words on a piece of paper and handed it to me. I read:

> Mr. Spearman is unknown to the parties you are after. I thought it best to have this gentleman impersonate him. He is O. K. HELEN.

"It seems to me," I remarked noncommittally, after reading the note two or three times, "that you are taking a lot of credit for my impersonation."

She laughed softly and came very near to making a *moue* at me.

"Of course. Don't you see that I want to get all the credit I can out of the Secret Service. They may pay better, you know, if they think I have engineered it all. When you live by your wits you have to think of everything."

"You ought to have quite a bank account," I said.

We went down to breakfast. There were many people about, but her eyes seemed to have been keener than mine, for she said to me while pretending to be talking about things on the menu:

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"Mr. Dietz has just gone out. He has probably been around here hours watching for us. He knew I was going to your room last night. I guess he is satisfied now."

Before we had half finished with breakfast Mr. Goss came in. I had a suspicion that Mr. Dietz had told him we were there. Perhaps it was a coincidence. But I don't believe much in coincidences.

"Good morning, Mr. Spearman," he said cheerfully.

He was going by to another table. But I thought I might as well return a little of his hospitality for the day before, and besides that I thought it would be a good chance to see whether she really knew him. So I asked him to stop at our table, then remembered with the nearest thing to consternation that I have ever felt that I did not know her name. How I was to introduce her I could not for an instant think. But life is like a poker game; there are many ways of bluffing.

I put on as nearly as I could the fatuous enthusiasm of a lover, and in introducing Mr. Goss to her seemed to forget what her maiden name was in the proud pleasure of informing him that before many days had passed she would be Mrs. Spearman.

He was quite interested and gallantly felicitated me, expressed himself as pleased to join us, and he made himself charming.

She blushed and gave me a startled look that must have seemed to Mr. Goss much like the momentary confusion of a modest fiancée; but to me it conveyed fleetingly that she admired my daring bluff and would play up to it. In that second we understood each other better than during the whole of the night before.

Closely as I watched I could not detect the faintest sign that she or Mr. Goss had ever heard of each other. He had the ease and manner of an old friend of mine, bantered politely with her, and once addressed her as "Miss," then paused as if recalling that he had not heard her name.

"Miss Montaigne," she supplied blushing. "Jimmy how could you forget!"

"Why, didn't I introduce you?" I asked innocently of Mr. Goss.

"You did, Mr. Spearman. You did. I understand perfectly. I was young once. We never think much of a lady's maiden name and want to get it out of the way just as fast as we can."

Presently, when we had almost finished breakfast, Mr. Goss asked:

"Miss Montaigne, I'm sure you won't be jealous, but Mr. Spearman has promised to spend a few hours with me this evening. We have a little—ah—we are going to tell fortunes with cards."

"I know, Mr. Goss," she said for all the world like a bride. "He told me it was to be his bit of freedom. Besides, I leave this evening for Washington. I'll be glad to leave him in your hands."

"Thank you. Thank you," he said beamingly.

I began to be suspicious that this fair Delilah was bargaining right under my nose with the Philistines. But she had me bound hand and foot, for the moment. I played up to the rôle, as best I could, of the doting lover. I was solicitously attentive. I beat the waiter to it in pulling back her chair, and when Mr. Goss didn't know that I was watching him I impulsively squeezed her hand.

She jerked it away from me, whispering loud enough for Mr. Goss to hear:

"Don't, Jimmy! Not in public!"

If Belasco knew as much about her as I do he would mortgage everything down to his last collar-button to get her name on a contract. And I thought, too, as I watched Mr. Goss's agreeable and charmingly avuncular interest in us lovers that for some reason or other the stage doesn't get the best actors for the men's rôles. He carried himself like an old family friend who had known me so many years instead of hours. He went further. He carried her off from me and they sat together in an alcove of the lobby, and I began to think now I understood why she had been so cheerful and smiling before breakfast.

I let her go because she had pinched my arm significantly, and with a glance indicated the man in the brown derby who had stared at me so hard the night before. Her lips barely formed the words, "Secret Service," and I understood. Then she and Mr. Goss walked away, as she said cheerfully to me:

"Go get your cigars, Jimmy. I know you won't be happy till you get 'em. But keep away from me till you have smoked. I can't endure it. You don't smoke, do you, Mr. Goss?"

"Never!" he lied gallantly.

"Jimmy's smoking days are pretty near

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over too." And with a backward glance she flashed me a message that, to any one who saw it, meant complete admiration and unreasoning love.

The irony of it was that I don't smoke and never did. But I walked to the cigar-case and hung over it indecisively, trying to impress upon the young lady behind the counter that I was extremely particular in my selection. She must have smiled behind my back, for, after studying carefully and remarking that I could not endure any but the choicest flavors, I indicated a certain box, took a cigar and handed her a dollar. I got back ninety-five cents in change.

I was starting to protest that I had made a mistake — for I was bound to smoke enough of it to leave tobacco on my breath lest Mr. Goss might wonder if he should notice that I hadn't smoked—when the man in the brown derby appeared at my side and asked for cigars.

He showed no surprise or awkwardness when I surreptitiously offered him the note. We walked away together.

I told him plainly that I would not go on with the rôle until I was convinced that he was a Secret Service man; though one look at his face was almost enough of a credential. We sat down together and I gave him the lead in the conversation.

He began talking of mining stock loudly enough to be heard by any gentlemen fifteen or twenty feet away. I knew that he knew what he was about; but I didn't know just what it was. Presently he said:

"Here's the certificate of a new company that's just opened in Nicaragua. It's rather unique. Probably nothing much to it, but I bought a few shares out of curiosity. Look it over."

I read the document he handed me. I followed his cue and said it was unique and all that. But when I returned the paper I knew that a big weight was off my mind. There was no doubt as to the man in the brown derby.

When the gentleman who sat almost concealed behind his paper some fifteen feet away had decided there was nothing more worth listening to and went off without a glance at either of us, Mr. Franklin said:

"I'm pretty sure that's the man they've detailed to pay you the money. He's a bit suspicious of me. I have a dozen men who are suspicious of him. We've been after the Big Chief for a long time. I think we'll get him this trip. But you had us all up in the air yesterday and last night. I know Spearman. I couldn't imagine what your game was. I telegraphed to Washington and found that he had gone to the hospital. Just got the answer this morning. He's been under a big strain. I tried to disconcert you last night by staring you out of countenance in the hope that you would get panicky and give away your hand. Then I was afraid I had blundered and given away mine."

"Miss Montaigne," I asked, "are you absolutely sure of her?"

He looked at me hard as if trying to get to the back of my brain and see what was there. His were not easy eyes to meet and hold.

"Are you?" he asked.

"She's already sold out one side—why not the other?"

From the strange way he acted I began to think that he didn't know about her double-crossing the Big Chief, but it was preposterous to suppose that he didn't. His question somewhat explained his attitude, for he asked in suppressed amazement—

"Do you know that?"

"I would hardly make a wild leap and guess it."

"I don't like to talk, but there is something remarkably strange about this. Outside of Mr. Spearman, whom she had to tell —she couldn't have made him get the plan any other way—only two people knew it. She and myself. It was absolutely necessary to have the plan stolen so that there would be so much agitation behind the scenes in the Navy Department that the other German spies would hear of it and report—and their reports would dovetail with hers. You see, the master mind behind that organization sets spies to watch his spies. That's why she has to be so careful. That is why the plan actually had to be stolen. The Navy Department couldn't have pretended that a plan was stolen and have convinced a babe. If I hadn't seen you with her and you hadn't handed me that note, signed just as it was, I would have begun to think a lot of things that wouldn't bring you good luck. But now I can't ask you questions. If you know, you know. She must have told you and—well, you've the right to know.

"Be sure to get a good description of that

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man who comes to you with money and takes the blue-print. My men are watching your room to follow anybody who meets you there and leaves. I have men all over this place waiting to follow every stranger who speaks to you. But we think we know the man who will be the messenger. I know he won't keep it long in his possession. It is too precious. And we know that plan is wanted in a hurry. The man who takes it won't have time to inspect it carefully to see whether it is the right one or not, and probably couldn't tell if he did. All we want is to see him deliver it.

"The Big Chief will go crazy when he sees that he has been fooled. That's one trouble with foreigners—they think because America is a commercial, money-getting nation that money can buy any man in it. Then they turn around and rob their victim over again. I've known that to happen time and time again. They would pay some poor devil some thousand or so, then before he could get home or to a bank he would have his pocket picked or be held up. You must be careful. But this trip I believe we are going to land the men higher up. Miss Montaigne seldom fails."

He got up and said "good-by" as if leaving a casual stranger with whom he had spent a few minutes. I puffed once on my cigar then threw it away. I felt that it was strong enough on my breath to let anybody know fifty feet away that I had been smoking. Then I went in search of Miss Montaigne and Mr. Goss.

I stopped to watch them from afar. If they were talking confidentially they did it amazingly well, for he seemed to be entertaining her with amusing stories and she was smiling and laughing continuously.

As I came up, she arose, laughing:

"Oh Jimmy! Mr. Goss has been telling me the most amusing things about a Mr. Jones, a Welshman, who simply loves to play poker and can't understand why three queens should beat three knaves. He says three women can't beat one knave!"

"And I say," Mr. Goss added, having also stood up, "that three knaves aren't a match for one woman—if she is pretty! You'll meet Jones this evening, Mr. Spearman. He is quite a character. It makes him angry if any one takes him for a Dutchman. Do you speak German?"

"Not a word," I said.

"Nor do I. But I hoped you did. Jones's English is badly broken. I tell him it sounds like German. I wish you knew it. It would be fine sport if you pretended to mistake his nationality and addressed him in German. Good-by. I've been simply delighted to meet you Miss Montaigne. And I am sorry you are leaving the city so soon."

He excused himself and went off, and she kept up her rôle of the adoring fiancée who thinks that no one can tell that she is one until we, too, had walked from the hotel.

"That man wears a mask," she said when we reached the street.

"More like a blanket."

"You asked me about Mr. Goss last night. What do you know of him?"

"Not a thing except that he is a crook. A good one, too. He is capable."

"He is that," she agreed. "And you are the most secretive man I ever met. You never answer a question. Where are we going now?"

"I'll answer that. To the post-office after the blue-print. Then to some good engineer with a good American name."

"Really?"

"Yes."

She laughed outright.

"What's the joke?"

"Why should I spoil it by telling? You don't trust me yet?"

"Yes. Since I found how you had made Mr. Franklin trust you, I think you are playing square with the highest bidder."

She gave me an indignant glance but said nothing. I had said it deliberately. I didn't want her to take the lover's rôle too seriously. You can't do anything with a woman after she thinks you have even begun to love her. And I hadn't.

I went on to say that as a man who sometimes risks a little money on his gambling judgment, I would be willing to bet something like 3 to 2 that she could be trusted in the affair Mr. Franklin and I had in hand; but that I didn't see any reason for taking any kind of a chance when it could be avoided.

We rode to the post-office. I looked on my cuff to see how to spell the name to which I had addressed the envelope with the blue-print in it. As I put the envelope into my pocket she said—

"What a strange name!"

"Isn't it?" I agreed.

I wasn't suggesting to a professional spy

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any little tricks that might come in handy to her some day; so I didn't explain.

After some inquiry I decided to go to the Marine Construction Company. Miss Montaigne seemed highly amused. I couldn't imagine what about. It was not easy to get to see the chief engineer. But I was willing to wait.

Miss Montaigne continued to smile and once in a while would put her handkerchief to her mouth as if to suppress laughter. The longer we waited the more amusing she appeared to think it was. I wondered if I had by accident picked out some concern that was in league with the Big Chief and knew her. I am suspicious and cautious. A man who tries to live more or less honestly by his wits has to be cautious.

Finally we were shown into a room where an elderly but thoroughly energetic man sat at a flat-top desk. A large table was in the room and on this were many blue-prints with their strange, cabalistic white angular tracings. Pictures of ships were on the walls. But I was satisfied. Miss Montaigne could be as amused as she pleased. The engineer's name was Thomas and in his buttonhole was the simple but significant little button of the G. A. R.

I told him plainly that I had a blue-print which had come into my hands under suspicious circumstances; that I was afraid it might be something of value to the Government; that I wanted him to look it over and if he thought it had any value whatever to our Navy Department I would at once mail it to Washington.

He glanced at me keenly, interestedly, and said—

"Let me see it."

I opened the envelope and gave it to him. He looked at it, frowned, bent over it, then after some study got up and took it to the large table and swept other blue-prints away to make room for spreading the one I gave him. Miss Montaigne was watching him intently and seemed to be restraining herself. She had her closed fingers pressed tightly against her lips and leaned forward with an appearance of suppressed excitement.

Mr. Thomas studied the blue-print with hard, earnest, contracted face. It obviously puzzled him. I began to believe I had been wise in not trusting her.

Suddenly his face lighted up with a smile and he looked at me at the same time folding the plan.

"Very ingenious. Very ingenious," he said. "I couldn't make it out for a moment. I think some one has been playing a joke on you. Clever, too. I assure you this is nothing that will interest the Navy Department. At least I hope not. I hope they don't need it. Sometimes wonder though. Congress wants to build post-offices instead of battle-ships. But this—this sir, is a very elaborate and remarkably ingenious and complicated plan of a rowboat."

A peal of laughter burst on my ears. Miss Montaigne was almost hysterical. Perhaps the surprise on my face did impress her as funny. I tried to appear as if I enjoyed the joke. I did in a way. But most of my satisfaction came from imagining the amazement that would spread across the face of the Big Chief when he, too figured out what it was.

Mr. Thomas's glance at her was an amiable accusation, but she protested that she was not responsible.

"I knew what it was, but he wouldn't believe me," she explained.

"You didn't tell me it was a rowboat," I said.

"If I had—oh my, but you would have thought it outrageous that I should take you to be so simple as to believe that."

Mr. Thomas didn't begrudge the time we had taken. He too enjoyed the situation and refused to consider that he should be paid a fee for saving the plan of a fine rowboat for his Government. I didn't spoil his joke by telling him that he had done just the opposite.

On our way back to the hotel she sat leaning back in a corner of the taxi and most of the time laughed at me. Now and then she would say, "Rowboat."

I refused to be embarrassed. I patted my pocket with an air of proud possession, just as if I had saved the most valuable plan in the country, and I couldn't help wondering what would have happened if my burglarious Mr. Dietz had stumbled onto the crumpled newspapers instead of kicking them out of the way, and had carried a rowboat puzzle to the Chief.

I mentioned that to her and she made a quick gesture of despair, as if she didn't want to think of how desperate the situation would have then become.

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"I don't know. He might have thought only that Jimmy had fooled me or he might have thought that I am—what I am. My O. K. is on it, you know."

"How on earth did you ever palm this thing off on an expert constructor like Jimmy?"

"He never looked at it. Jimmy didn't know what he was doing half the time. I wanted to get even with the Big Chief for all the trouble he has caused me. I got a clever engineer to have that drawn—it is a kind of a draftsman's puzzle. You must remember that Jimmy sent his suit-cases to New York several days before he expected to come. In fact, he sent them by the same train that I came on. Of course, I switched the plans at the last minute. He would probably never have looked at it again anyway. Now do you trust me?"

"Yes," I said reluctantly.

"Why?" She was trying to tease me.

"Because," I said very seriously, "I am finding that you protect those who trust you, even though you do dupe them. You can't expect me to pretend to understand your attitude toward Jimmy. It is utterly incomprehensible to me."

After a moment she said quietly—

"And to me, too."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I didn't want Jimmy to steal that plan —not just to please me. And he did."

"You tempted him to the best of your very excellent ability."

"PLEASE don't be sarcastic now. I did tempt him. There were many reasons. Perhaps one of them was colored with vanity. I was horrified and thrilled at the same time when, after resolutely saying he would not do it for any one or anythng, he came to me one evening and laid the precious blue-print in my lap. He said then: 'You said if I loved you I would do it. There it is. I am a traitor. But I love you.' Oh you must believe me when I say that I wanted to tell him the truth—the whole truth—time and time again. But can't you understand that most of all I wanted his honor to rise up of its own accord and demand the plan back. I wanted him to vindicate himself, to spurn me if necessary—but to keep his manhood! Can't you understand that?"

I said nothing. I made no movement. I did not even change my expression. I was thinking that I could understand how noble women, with high ideals and true honesty in their hearts, could feel that way about the men they loved; but I couldn't understand how an avowed adventuress such as she could feel so passionately the need for resurgent honor within a man before he seemed worthy of *her* love, particularly when, as she admitted, it was largely the urging of her vanity that had first brought him low.

"You must believe me by this time when I say that I have protected Jimmy every way I could. You have met Franklin. He thinks Jimmy stole that plan knowing that I would give the Big Chief what you like to call the double-cross. He thinks Jimmy was in the scheme. I substituted the plan you have there for the real one so there would be no chance of the submarine secret being taken from this country. I went to what I thought was his room last night and waited like a shameless woman because I wanted to give him one more chance to change his mind before I told him the truth. I wanted to hear him declare what you did declare: that there wasn't money enough or women enough in Europe to get so much as a postage-stamp if it would be to the advantage of foreign spies!

"I felt almost as happy when you told me of how Jimmy had written you. But before that I thought you were really the Big Chief. I was deathly frightened too. When you taunted me with resigning from the spy service and going with him to South America, I was sure that my game was lost. That was when I tried to shoot you. If the Big Chief knew that much, then I was sure that the spies he had shadowing me at Washington knew more. I actually thought my end had come. It was less fear that hurt than the sickening realization that I had failed—failed!

"You can never know what I have gone through. Don't you realize yet that I am an agent of the United States Secret Service? For three years we have been trying desperately to ferret out that man behind the cleverest spy organization ever seen in this country. Its spies are everywhere, but I had to try for six months before I could even locate anybody who would listen to me pretend to sell secrets of the Secret Service. I posed as a traitor to the United States. That's one reason why it was so hard for me to get into the Big

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Chief's confidence at all. Franklin and I alone knew what I was up to. We didn't see how else we could be sure to keep it secret. That's one reason why I didn't want to tell even Jimmy.

"The Chief finally sent me after that plan. That was the first really big thing he had sent me after. It showed he was beginning to trust me. Franklin said to make a traitor out of Spearman if he had any traitorous blood in him—for I might as well find it out as to have somebody else. That was another reason why I tested Jimmy as I did. After he stole the plan I told Franklin that it had been necessary to take Jimmy into my confidence. It was necessary that it should be stolen. If there hadn't been a commotion in the Navy Department the Big Chief would have grown suspicious in a minute. But of course, Franklin had practically all there was to say about the search for the thief, and with the plan locked up in his own safe, he kept the Service men from bothering Jimmy. Why, the boy would have been caught in two hours if I hadn't lied for him.

"Then I was practically a traitor to my country for love of him. Don't you see that I was? I protected a traitor. That is why I don't think of Jimmy as a real traitor—I know what it is to love! Besides, I had told Jimmy I was a foreign spy and that if I failed I would proably lose my life—so he thought he had to become a traitor to save me. That was no exaggeration. I will lose it if the Big Chief finds out what I have done and he isn't caught.

"And that note I made him write—I had to do it. I, of course, pretended to the Big Chief as I did to Franklin that I couldn't steal the plan from Jimmy, and that I couldn't make him give it to me. From the very first, as you know, Franklin and I had schemed how to switch blue-prints on the Chief when we laid the trap to catch him. So I insisted that Jimmy would not trust it with me or anybody else without being paid the money.

"I knew the Big Chief wouldn't pay $30,000 for that or any other plan without trying to get the money back, and he wouldn't have as much chance of doing it if the money were sent to me as if Jimmy were called to a New York hotel. It's more than merely the money with the Big Chief I think, though he is undoubtedly avaricious. But he seems to take a delight in fleecing his victims—first of their honor, then of the money he pays for the lost honor. He leaves them naked.

"So I had to get Jimmy's handwriting to a note in which he promised to sell the plan for $30,000 before the Big Chief would consent to make an appointment. He knew that with such a note he would have a club over Jimmy's head and could make him keep the appointment. Of course, I shall tell Franklin if necessary that Jimmy had written that to help trap the Big Chief, and Franklin will believe it. Hasn't he the plan Jimmy offered for sale locked up in his own safe and doesn't he think that Jimmy knows it is there?

"Now you can begin to understand something of the strain I have been under. Working for my country has been a passion with me. I never dreamed there was a man who could take precedence over it. I said to myself even after I began to care for Jimmy and was then urging him to steal the plan—I said to myself: 'I would readily give up the man I loved if war came; and how much more readily should I give him up if he is weak enough to be a traitor!' But I couldn't. I wouldn't. And when you told me last night of that letter, I was so happy I was numb. I scarcely knew what I was doing. I wanted to believe you so badly that I didn't dare—if you can understand that."

"I do, perfectly," I said, very much ashamed of myself for the brutal way I had treated her. "I felt exactly that way about you."

"Isn't it lovely? Aren't you happy? I want to get out here in the street and scream, but there is still the Big Chief. He simply has to be caught. He has that note—he can ruin Jimmy yet."

"I thought you could explain that to Franklin?"

"Franklin isn't the entire country. Listen: If we don't get that note, one of these days some paper here in New York claiming about a million readers will suddenly flash a big scoop. 'Brilliant naval officer steals and offers for sale submarine plan!' Congressmen will get up and demand a public investigation. Congressmen want everything done in public—publicity is derived from that, you know. The Secret Service would be greatly injured if forced to bare its plans even to a committee of congressmen. It will be another Drey-

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fus case—even if Jimmy should be eventually vindicated his career will be ruined. But I had to send in that note.

"If Franklin locates the Chief he will raid his rooms, he will search his papers and I will get a chance to destroy that note right away. The only clue we have though will be to follow the man to whom you give that blue-print this afternoon. That is why I got so excited when I found you didn't have it. That is why I told Jimmy he simply must keep it near him all the time, though I knew every effort would be made to steal it from him."

"Do you suppose," I asked, "that the man who comes to me for the blue-print would talk if I should encourage him with one of these?"

I patted a heavy pocket where an automatic lay.

"No, no. Don't try that. He may not even know the Big Chief himself. He may be instructed to give it to some one else; and that some one else may be instructed to pass it on; and it may be passed on through three or four hands and only the last person will know who the Big Chief is. Franklin is certain that they will feel secure if they can even get the blue-print, because they think its value is so great that the Secret Service would not dare take a chance on letting it get away simply to see to whom it will ultimately go. I don't believe the Big Chief has an idea that he is being watched or tricked. He is simply a desperately cautious man."

"But Franklin told me he was being watched himself."

"No doubt. I am sure that every stranger in the hotel is also being watched by some of the Big Chief's men. It's a matter of precaution."

"That must be some job in so large a hotel."

"Not so very—not if the clerks, the bell boys, the waiters, the chambermaids, are all on the Big Chief's payroll."

"It must be pretty plain to you," I said, "that Mr. Goss is at least connected with the organization. His arranging the poker game—That is, it will look something more than a coincidence if I am paid that $30,000 just before I go to his room. I have figured it out that he wouldn't try to take the blue-print away from me himself because that might cause trouble and attract attention to him."

She listened thoughtfully, and I thought with a touch of admiration on her face, while I related in detail just what had taken place the first night and how I had followed the man I now knew to be Dietz to Goss's room.

When I had finished she told me with what seemed less of flattery than a business-like offer that if I ever wanted to ally myself with the Secret Service she could promise that I wouldn't have any difficulty. I said I would think it over, but that from what I had learned of Secret Service work in the past few hours I thought it would be a little strenuous for a man like myself who enjoyed the sedentary and dangerless excitement of poker.

If trouble comes up and insists on shaking hands with me, I sometimes make its acquaintance; and once in a while if I see somebody I like, or think I would like if I got to know him, having a hard time of it—well, I will occasionally do a friendly service. Then, of course, it often happens that somebody is likely to get hurt, and, like anybody else in the world, I do what I can to prevent myself from being the injured party.

AS SOON as we stepped out of the taxi in front of the hotel, Miss Montaigne resumed her rôle of adoring fiancée. But for me the excitment of it had passed. I, too, did my part as well as I could. But now that I knew she was to be thoroughly trusted, there was no zest in the pose, no stimulation. She had only to remember the name I was under—had only to call me "Jimmy"—and her pulse would be quickened, her affectionate glances sincere.

But, as I watched her and played up to my unnatural part, something of what it must mean to a man to have such a woman as she really love him became clear to me; and again I said to myself as I often say with perhaps a trace of bitterness: The destiny of each man is written with the fingers of a woman.

It was past noon when we returned, and, after a bit of lunch, we made ourselves easy for any and all to watch in case there were those who cared to watch. I saw nothing of Franklin, Goss, or the man I was sure I would recognize as Dietz or Jones.

There were many other people about; they came and what they were about, I

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could not tell. It may have been their own business or it may have been mine.

Miss Montaigne and I both grew tired of waiting; but I was less anxious than she. I didn't know what was coming; but it seemed to me that it could not be otherwise than in the nature of an anti-climax, now that her identity had been revealed.

On the other hand, I am entitled to little credit for what calmness I may have when hazardous issues are in the dice-box ready to be shaken out. There is much that is fatalistic in my nature. As at the gaming-table, I take the cards as they are dealt and play them for what I think they are worth; and if I lose—well, I lose. Jimmy meant much to me, and I knew it was going to be a perilous thing for anybody to stand between me and what results seemed necessary to keep his mind at ease and his career untarnished. But she loved him as a woman loves, and every fiber of her body was tense with anxiety.

We were getting ready to go in to dinner. We spoke of it. Some one near must have heard, for as we stood up a very few minutes later a man passed by and with a quick, furtive movement pushed a note into my hand, then walked away so rapidly I got but a blurred glance at the side of his face. On our way into the dining-room I stopped to purchase a magazine. Apparently looking at the pictures in it, I managed to read the note so none but the closest observers could have seen what I was about. I didn't know whether the note was from Franklin or the other parties. It said:

> Send for a newspaper while you are at dinner. Fold it as if hiding something in it while at the table. Hand it to the man that offers you a package as you come from the dining-room.

That might mean any one of a number of things; but I was sure it meant that the cautious, deep-scheming Big Chief was arranging a ruse to throw Franklin's men off the trail of the man who would really get the blue-print. It might, however, be a ruse of Franklin's. I didn't know from whom the instructions came.

Miss Montaigne was interested but understood that it was wisest for me not to tell her. There were many people about us. Some one of them might be there to listen.

After we sat down, I sent out for an evening paper. I glanced over it as if interested in the headlines, then, pretending to be surreptitious, put it on my lap under the table, folded it, and kept it there until we got up.

Miss Montaigne toyed with her dishes but ate little. I, too, was not hungry. But we lingered and chatted over the courses. Not for an instant did she forget her rôle, and not for an instant did she overplay it. She must have visualized Jimmy when she looked at me.

As we arose from the table a man got up from another table, between us and the door, and walked from the room a few feet ahead of us. Outside, in the lobby, he turned quickly and said:

"Good evening, Mr. Spearman. Here is a package for you."

He pulled from his pocket a small bundle, which looked as if it might be a package of $1,000 bills.

I said, "Thank you," took it, and handed him the folded newspaper.

He walked hastily out of the hotel. A man who was loitering over the newsstand apparently decided there was nothing he cared for and walked out as if he had suddenly remembered an appointment that called him from the hotel. Another man, nearer the door, who had been sitting as if time were heavy on his hands, threw away his cigar, got up and went out.

My fancy was vivid, no doubt, but it seemed as if so many men were going out at the same time, apparently independent of each other, that the fellow who took my newspaper must have calculated on almost clearing the lobby.

Miss Montaigne admitted she was tired, and said she was going to her own room for a while—a room she had engaged before she came to the one she thought was Jimmy's.

Left alone, I loitered about waiting for some one to approach. It was almost eight o'clock—the hour set for the poker game in Goss's room. I began to think the engagement for the game was a ruse to have me deliver the blue-print to him there. Perhaps he would try to take it away from me. Undoubtedly, he would scrutinize it carefully even though it did have the guarantee of "O. K. B 52" written on the back.

I decided that in such an event I would not waste time in getting a gun under his nose. Then, while I held it there, I would explain to him in detail the reason for my rudeness.

I went to my room, made sure the blinds

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were down as I had left them, locked the door, left the key in it to cut off inspection from the hallway, examined the automatics to make assurance doubly sure, and proceeded to tear up a sheet. I took wide strips and twisted them until they were strong enough to hold anybody's hands and legs. While I was working at this the telephone rang.

"Hello, Mr. Spearman? This is Goss. Jones is here. We're waiting. Come on down."

I said I might be a little late as I had an appointment, or at least was waiting to see if the man would keep it.

"Tell the clerk to have your man call you in my room if you want. But we are waiting. Jones is anxious to get started. Says he feels lucky."

That seemed fair enough to me. I began to think that I had misjudged Goss if he was willing to get me into a poker game before I got the money. The package that had been given me in exchange for the newspaper contained nothing but blank strips of paper.

I said that I would be right down.

However, I took time to finish my work with the sheet and stuffed the ropes I had made of it into the front of my trousers.

One of the five elevator cages was at the floor as I approached. It was empty except for the pilot. I stepped in and said—

"Second floor, please."

Instead of going down he went up. He went to the top floor and as far above that as seemed possible for the cage.

I had been suspicious from the first. It takes little to make me suspicious when there is trouble in the air. He seemed harmless. The most dangerous men do.

I didn't say anything when he went up past the top floor because there are times when words are a waste of energy. One hand was in my coat pocket, a finger on the trigger; with the other hand I stroked my chin which permitted me to keep my arm up so that it would take only a slight movement to ward off a sudden blow.

But the pilot was like an automaton. As if he had no knowledge or interest in what he was about he handed me a package much like the first I had received, saying—

"When you inspect this I'll take your blue-print."

As both my hands were engaged, I told him to tear it open. He did. I assured myself that the bills were not counterfeit and then handed him the blue-print, still keeping, however, a finger on the trigger. But that was a needless precaution. The pilot did nothing more than look on the back of the blue-print and, finding the "O. K. B 52," said:

"It's all right. You want the second floor?"

It wasn't much of a question that "You want the second floor?" Of course I had told him I did, but I wondered if he wouldn't have said it any way.

I was confident that if I tried to get word to Miss Montaigne or to Mr. Franklin that the pilot, or some other agent would instantly find out and set about making trouble for me. I had already seen enough to know that I was being closely watched. So, trusting to luck, though very much disappointed, I had to resign myself to the fact that Franklin's men had been outwitted.

No one could possibly have seen this transaction. If I insisted on going down to the lobby I wouldn't have known whom to tell that the blue-print had been taken by the pilot. And of course I could not wait around and try to see to whom he passed it. He could shoot up and down the elevator shaft and might give the plan to some one waiting on any floor, or any passenger. The resourcefulness of the Big Chief was remarkable. I understood why it was so hard to discover his identity.

The pilot stopped at the second floor and I got out without a glance at him. Any kind of a glance could have done nothing except perhaps have made him suspicious.

I felt a bit dispirited. I wasn't positive that Goss was the Big Chief. I had felt confident of it the night before, but now I felt that it was hoping a great deal to expect that such a resourceful and cautious man as the Big Chief would take a personal interest in fleecing me of the money advanced for a stolen plan.

I thought, however, there was likely to be an exciting evening ahead for me and that the excitement would start just about two minutes after the Big Chief—no matter who he was—got his eyes on that elaborate plan of a rowboat. Miss Montaigne, too, would be in a desperate situation. She had vouched for its genuineness.

THE hall carpets were thick, and moreover I stepped lightly, so my approach to Goss' door was noiseless. For the benefit of whoever might be

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watching, I pretended to fumble through my pockets as if looking for something before I knocked; but my ears were strained to hear what I might hear.

The conversation was low, in a foreign tongue, and certainly earnest. It seemed to me that there were more than two men in the room. I couldn't tell; but I had that impression. Nothing however appeared to be gained by listening, so I rapped loudly.

There was a moment of silence within the room, then a voice—Goss'—called out "All right, Mr. Spearman," and after just enough delay to be noticed by a suspicious man, opened the door. The delay, I estimated, had been long enough to allow a third party—if there had been one—to pass into the adjoining room of which I had caught a glimpse when Goss had entertained me the day before.

Goss was jovial. He almost patted me on the back. I have never had a man pat me on my back in my life. I would as soon have my nose tweaked.

He introduced me to Mr. Jones. A glance at his left hand, and later at the bunion on his right foot, together with the broken accent that may, for all I know, have sounded Welsh as his name, made me aware that we had met before. It was just as I had expected; but I was glad to be sure. I might have occasion to comment on it.

Three chairs were about a table at which Mr. Jones was idly playing solitaire when he got up to meet me. He may have been normally a funny man as Mr. Goss had insisted, but the whole of his attention seemed devoted to trying not to believe there was any chance of my recognizing him.

I had deliberately given Mr. Goss a wrong description of the burglar because I thought it might be interesting to encourage him to meet me again. But as I noted Mr. Jones's nervousness, his habit of starting in a quick movement of alarm at the slightest noise, and particularly the worried glances that he threw over his shoulder at the closed door of the adjoining room, I became quite sure that he had not met me again in a spirit of bravado or in an eagerness to even accounts; it was more as if he had been driven into his last chance to redeem himself for failing to find the blue-print and for bungling in my room.

But Jones or Dietz, or whatever his name was, told me unconsciously by his manner that Goss was more of an equal than a superior. Goss was encouraging, assisting him. Jones was handicapped and had difficulty in appearing at ease. It was almost pathetic, though I was not in a mood to be touched by sympathy, to watch him heavily try to be debonair. But Goss was splendidly vivacious.

I was a bit relieved when I noticed that the chair they wanted me to sit in faced the door of the adjoining room. But there is usually a well-defined reason for everything. Sometimes we fail to detect the reason. I did not.

In a glance I knew why my position had been selected for me. They were not real card sharpers. Whatever they may have known, or what skill they may have had in the delicate art of stacking and palming cards, they were consciously incompetent to depend on the swiftness of their fingers. It is not boasting for me to say—nor do I feel as much pride in it as I once did—that I have probably as much skill in handling cards as it is possible for a man to acquire. There is no magician on the stage, bewildering his audiences night after night with amazing dexterity in plucking cards from the air or blowing a pack apparently into nothing—but really sheltering it in his palm—who has a surer skill than myself. It has taken years of hard practise.

As a result I can do things with cards that Mr. Jones and Mr. Goss probably never heard of, and would have thought incredible had they heard of them. At least, they knew so little of the real skill at cheating that they had ingeniously arranged a triptych mirror behind me. Few people would perhaps have noticed it. But I knew that from where each of them sat, unless I kept my hands "squeezed"—that is, unless I held the cards close together while I inspected the tips—both Jones and Goss would be able to see reflected in the mirror just what I had.

Ordinarily there can be a dozen mirrors and a dozen confederates behind me and no one can see what cards I hold, because I never spread the cards out like a fan. Careful players never do. Jones and Goss simply did not know the game as Americans play it. They held their cards spread out in front of their faces—and I did likewise.

I wanted this game to be over as soon as possible. I had decided that I would investigate the adjoining room within an hour. Perhaps I should have gone about trussing up my "friends" and getting into the next

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room at once. But sometimes my sense of humor gets the better of my discretion. Jones and Goss knew the value of cards as they are rated by Hoyle and that was all they did know of poker. Their faces served almost as effective as mirrors in telling me what kind of hands they had.

I began systematically to bluff, and to get caught at it. Thanks to the mirror, wherein I let my cards be reflected, Jones and Goss never risked anything when they called me. I bluffed and bluffed; I seemed to get exasperated and I swore that I would yet make them both lay down the best hands if it took every cent I had.

Nothing had been said about the limit, and the stakes were steadily growing higher. I decided that it was time to end the game so I could be about more important work. I had already selected five cards that I expected to need and put them into my pocket. When it came my time to deal I too a moment longer than usual to shuffle.

I put five clubs on the bottom of the deck and gave them to Mr. Jones. I knew he would play his hand stronger than Mr. Goss would play the same hand, because Jones had some reason associated with his backward glances toward the adjoining room for being desperately anxious to trim me.

I had drawn a pair of eights honestly. Goss had anted and Jones bet. In the way that I always bluffed, I raised him.

Goss dropped out, and Jones raised back. I raised again. He raised. I spread my cards before my face, pretending to study them, and revealed in the mirror that I had only a pair of eights—which, however, was a better hand than some I had played heavily. I raised again. He raised.

I reached into my pocket and drew five $1,000 bills, tossing them carelessly onto the table. Such rashness on my part was apparently for what they had been waiting. He reached into his pocket and raised me $5,000 more. I called; and being the dealer, asked how many cards he wanted.

"None—not a vun!" He was very excited.

I looked at him steadily for a moment, and said:

"I think you're bluffing yourself. You'd better draw all you want now, because I'm not coming again."

"I'm buffin' all right. Ya. I'm buffin'."

I tossed the deck aside.

"I'm not drawing any either," I said.

Jones looked his surprise, but to reassure him I spread the five cards again before my face and he looked into the mirror and saw the pair of eights. It wasn't the first time I had stood pat on nothing and bluffed like a fool.

"Your bet," I said to Jones.

He was quite beside himself with excitement. He knew nothing about the game from the standpoint of psychological science. He was aware that he had the best hand and that I was bluffing, still he threw on to the table a roll of bills big enough to have created a flurry in Wall Street. A man who is bluffing never calls a big bet: he may raise it, but it is positive lunacy to merely call if you are trying to play a pair of eights like a pat hand.

I couldn't possibly have raised his bet. He had thrown out what looked like more money than I ever had at any one time. If he had been a true poker player he would have "checked" the bet to me, forced me to make good my bluff with a bet and then lifted me out of my chair with his raise back. And if he had been a true poker player he would have grown suspicious when I emptied my pockets of all the money I had and said I would call to the extent of my pile.

He leaned forward joyously and spread out his flush. Goss also bent over beaming. They looked at me with gleeful faces while I soberly studied the five clubs, apparently trying to discover that one of them was a spade.

Jones began raking in the chips and coin and bills. I reached over and tapped his hands gently, saying:

"Wait a minute. You may want to take a peep at what I have here. That's a pretty hand all right. Something about five clubs that's inclined to make a fellow enthusiastic, but——"

With a swift stroke I spread under his nose the four little deuces that had been nestling in my pocket until such a time as I had seen fit to bring them into the game.

He gulped hoarsely as if choking. He knew nothing stronger than a pair of eights should be there. For some moments he and Goss glared in inarticulate astonishment, bringing their bulging eyes down almost against the cards. Very slowly, very slowly indeed, it became apparent to their bewildered brains that they had in some incom-

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prehensible manner been cheated. Jones lifted his face and looked past me accusingly at the mirror. It had lied.

Goss had the quicker brain. He looked accusingly at me. His face was drawn and white with anger, and the hands he had put on the table to assist in pushing the winnings toward Jones twitched convulsively. He knew no one but a man desperate and dangerous would make so bold a play. I, too, knew that he was getting ready to leap at me across the table.

We looked into each other's narrowed eyes. Perhaps it was scarcely longer than a second; it may have been ten seconds. But he was a beaten man and he knew it. He knew it before my hands suddenly appeared above the edge of the table, an automatic in each.

Instinctively, without a word from me, both men raised their arms and fastened their eyes in alarm on the muzzles.

"Mr. Dietz," I said quietly, to the man called Jones, "if you had taken the marks of those rings off your left hand and the bunion off your right foot and learned to talk English with a nasal accent, I might not know now that I was returning with pleasure your visit in my room the other night. And Mr. Goss, if you had studied poker as you have phrenology, you would know that I am a professional gambler instead of a naval constructor. If either of you gentlemen open your mouth without being asked to, if either of you speak loud enough to be heard more than ten feet away, or if you make any noise whatsoever, you will instantly lose all interest in what takes place thereafter in this room."

I spoke to them with more cool deliberation than I would have had in my younger years. It doesn't come entirely natural for me to be calm when my nerves are taut. But I have found that poise, even a little exaggerated poise, is often far more effective in impressing gentlemen whom you wish to keep quiet than threats. Fortunately, I have never had any difficulty in convincing people of the fact when I am in earnest. It has saved me much trouble, too. It did this time.

I had reason to be alarmed. There was some agitation audible in the adjoining room. Somebody had begun to pace the floor with heavy steps and swear in a strong voice. The voice was foreign, the oaths were foreign, but the world over and in any tongue it is usually apparent if a man in anger is swearing.

It came into my mind at once that the Big Chief—the real Chief, this time—had received the blue-print and discovered that it was drawn for the elaborate construction of a rowboat. It sounded just that way.

The faces of Goss and Jones were listening incomprehensibly to the rage in the next room. Their faces showed more than that: they showed that they held whoever was in that room in deadly fear. Perhaps the keyhole had revealed the situation in our room; but I thought the Big Chief would have something more to do than to spy like a chambermaid through a keyhole on two of his most trusted spies. Besides, I knew and they didn't know the true character of the blue-print which had no doubt been put in his hand during the past few minutes, and so, couldn't guess as well as myself as to what was the matter.

With no one watching or suspecting the elevator pilot, he could have had no difficulty in getting it on to the Big Chief. Undoubtedly the adjoining room also opened on to the hallway so that any one could come in or leave without passing through the one we were in.

But the Big Chief, I reflected quickly, thinking I was Spearman, would be likely to break in upon us and crazed by anger try to do what he thought proper to me. It would be easy enough to shoot him down, but I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to attract any more attention to those rooms than could be helped, for I knew very well that confederates of theirs would be the first to arrive if a shot were fired.

I quickly took down the triptych mirror so Goss and Jones could not see reflected in it what went on behind them, and, warning them that so much as one glance over their shoulder would result in promptly getting shot, I took a stand by the door of the adjoining room. I stood so that when it was opened I would be concealed by the door from whoever entered.

I had acted barely soon enough. The door was flung open and a powerful man burst in. In one hand he held a gun, in the other a crumpled blue-print which he waved violently. Expecting to see me sitting at the table, he roared out in English—

"Spearman, you dog——"

Everything happened very quickly. Despite my warning, both Jones and Goss

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turned a face ashen from fear over their shoulders. They were more afraid of the man who had come in than of me. I didn't blame them. They knew him better than they did me.

He was a larger man than I had expected, so I struck harder than I had intended to at the back of his head. The automatic of my right hand came down like a club. He fell, unconscious.

The situation was too complicated for comfort. But with gestures only I made Jones and Goss get up silently and stand with their hands lifted and press their faces against the wall. Then I turned my head away for a moment to glance into the adjoining room and so I made sure no one was there.

Taking the strips I had made from the sheet, I gave them to Goss and watched him bind the hands and feet of Jones; and after that the hands and feet of the big man on the floor. When I was sure that he had done it pretty well, I tied his own hands and feet and forced a gag into his mouth. I saved my "pear" gag for Jones. It was no time for facetiousness or I might have pointed out that I was returning his property.

After I had Goss trussed, I then went over the bindings on Jones and the other man and tied them correctly. Goss had been too unnerved to try to fool me by tying them loosely—he simply didn't know the most effective way of doing it. I did.

Some people think I am cold-blooded, but I didn't have the heart to gag the unconscious man, though I realized that his groans or cries might cause me trouble; besides, I expected it would be some time before he would come to himself.

I bent over Jones and poked the automatic firmly into his stomach. He squirmed just as I had wanted to do when he did the same to my stomach.

"Is that the Big Chief?" I asked.

He made no movement.

"You answer me, and you tell the truth. I am going into the next room to go over the papers. If I discover that you have lied to me, and that he is the Big Chief, I will come back here and——"

I significantly left the sentence unfinished.

His eyes were terror stricken; he hesitated, fearfully choosing between my threat and the perilous risk of giving away the identity of the big man who lay unconscious almost within arm's length. But Jones nodded his head.

I went closer and looked at the big man carefully. I had never seen him before. He had a powerful face, strong and ruthless. I could understand why his organization was so effective. I had thought Goss competent enough to perhaps be the Chief himself, but Goss was, when compared with the other man, fit to be only a lieutenant.

I am not ashamed to say that I shuddered when I thought of what an ordeal it would have been to face this man in a frontal attack. It is not everything to press the trigger first. Iolaus may shake dice with Hercules and win; the nimble-fingered cutpurse may shoot first—but when two men stand face to face and look into each other's eyes they settle then between them which shall live and which shall die though the shots that follow seem to come simultaneously.

I WENT into the next room. It was a fully equipped business office. The safe was open.

Papers, notations and records were all about. I looked them over. Those that were not incomprehensible seemed to me to refer to the export business with which Goss was ostensibly connected.

I was at a loss to know how to search intelligently amid such cryptic records; but going through a file in the safe I noticed it was listed with numbers such as A 28, A 29, A 30, and upon inspecting these found that in each seemed to be records and documents of each agent's activity. I was not long in locating B 52, and emptying it found what I wanted. It read:

> I have the missing submarine blue-print which your agent has spoken to me about and I will let you have it for $30,000. J. J. Spearman.

On the back of it was written, "Handwriting verified."

However, I didn't feel that my work was quite over when I had destroyed that note. I returned to Goss's room, got two big suitcases out of a closet, dumped the clothes and such things onto the floor, and going to the safe, proceeded to fill my suit-cases with what appeared to be the most interesting data. Much remained when I had all I could take away with me; and, as I was stuffing in the last paper, I remembered the bills that had been left on the poker table.

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I thought I was really entitled to them. A few more such winnings and I could retire comfortably to a country home and raise flowers. I remembered the big roll that Jones had thrown onto the table and estimated that it must at least be worth close to a hundred thousand.

It would have been, except for the counterfeit mixed with it. The money given me by the elevator pilot was genuine, and some of the other bills, too. But for the most part, Goss and Jones had played the game with counterfeit. They were certainly a wily combination to beat.

When I was ready to leave I didn't know how many spies were about, and, seeing a man far down the hallway, and coming toward me, I remembered Dietz's ruse and called out "Good night" to the prisoners within the room as I closed the door.

Almost at once I recognized Franklin. He was agitated. He said the Big Chief had evaded his men; that practically all of them had gone trailing off after the decoy to whom I gave the newspaper upon leaving the dining-room; that he had got in touch with Miss Montaigne and she was much worried about what would happen to me in Goss's room, and he had been watching it for an hour or more.

"Did you see any one go into Suite C—the door on the other side of this one—about twenty mintes or a half-hour ago?"

"A waiter brought up some sandwiches."

"So the blue-print was delivered right under your nose after all."

He looked at me in unbelieving astonishment.

"Come," I said, and I threw open the door. "The big man is the Big Chief. These suit-cases are full of records. Bundles of them are in the other room. I couldn't pack more. They're all for you."

"How—how on earth did you do it?" he asked, staring at the three men well tied and laid out on the floor.

"Poker," I answered enigmatically. "Poker—mostly bluff and a little luck."

"But——"

"I can't explain now Mr. Franklin. You'll take charge right away, of course. Better get all your men together for you'll find enough reading matter in these suit cases and in the next room to keep them busy the rest of the night. But I can't stay. Miss Montaigne is anxious to get away to Washington—and I think I'll go with her.

"But, by the way," I added, stepping into the room and picking up the crumpled blueprint that had fallen from the hand of the Big Chief when he fell, "if you don't object I think I'll take this along as a little souvenir—for Jimmy."

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FATE AND A FOOL

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "In Self-Defense," etc.

"I GIVE Thee thanks," sez he, scoopin' up some of th' bitter water, and inhalin' it through his whiskers. "I am Fate."

"Uh-huh," sez I, "that's jist what I figgered."

He looks jist like th' pitchers yuh see of th' ol'-timers who used to ride herd in Jerusalem. His clothes ain't exactly entitled to that appellation, and his ol' ragged hat seems to have grown to his head. His shoes —what there is left—is tied to his feet with strips of gunny-sack, and he holds himself together with an ol' army ca'tridge-belt. Whiskers? Say, that ol' bird didn't have anything else visible on th' front of his head, and when he opens his mouth to speak it looks like uh gash in uh haystack.

I sees this apparation when I rides up to th' alkali spring, and from th' pose of it out there ag'inst th' sky-line, with its rags flappin' in th' wind, and whiskers trailin', I opines to my bronc that if I was uh painter I'd draw uh pitcher like that and call it "Destiny."

"Tarriest thou long in these hills, friend?" he asks, when I tightens up my cinch and starts to roll uh cigaret. "Yonder, about a league, is my pore domicile, and thou art welcome to break bread. I am a sorrowing one and my name is Fate —known to men as Wetherbee. I seek my mate and revenge."

I don't like to have to break my bread, and uh man shore is loco to hunt fer revenge or a mate in th' Medicine Hills, so I forks my bronc.

"I shore wish yuh luck, ol'-timer," sez I. "Yuh may find revenge, but I has my doubt about th' mate part. I'll shore keep my eyes open fer anything that looks like yuh. My name is Ike—known to men as Harper. I seek fer strays. *Adios.*"

I pulls up about half uh mile from there and looks back. He's still there by th' spring, leanin' on his crooked stick and lookin' off across th' hills. I shore has my doubts about his mate. Nature never made but one mistake like him. I shakes up my bronc, lifts my voice in song and points toward Piperock.

Yuh won't find Piperock on no map. 'Most everybody who used to live at Yaller Hoss lives there, 'cause Yaller Hoss is only uh memory. As th' preacher we had for th' funeral of "Hip Shot" Williams said—

"Th' Lord giveth and th' Lord taketh away."

I reckon th' Lord gave us th' big spring at Yaller Hoss, but whether He had anything to do with th' takin' away or not, I don't know. Anyway it dried up and everybody moves ten miles further down th' landscape and founds Piperock.

Speakin' of Hip Shot, as uh side issue, I don't believe that anybody except Hip Shot himself had anything to do with his demise. He only had uh few teeth—all front ones—which he used to clamp dynamite caps to fuses. He got him some store teeth oncet and th' next time he gits ready to blast, he plumb forgot them back teeth, and bites down on that cap.

While Piperock ain't what you'd call uh

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financial center, there are times when, accordin' to rumor, there is uh heap of bullion in our one li'l Cattlemen's Bank. Bein' sort of uh half-way place on uh stage-line, th' pay-roll of th' Mica camps lays overnight there, and th' products of th' three big stamp-mills at Mica reposes there one night on its way out to th' mint. Uh course it ain't commonly known jist when this vulgar display uh wealth comes in, 'cause it might tempt some hombre from th' straight and narrow way.

THERE'S uh bunch celebratin' Ricky Henderson's birthday in Buck Masterson's saloon when I arrives, and I joins th' revelry with great cheer, givin' my stomach a landslide of alkali from my throat.

"Well, Ricky, here's hopin' yuh live to see Hank Padden herdin' sheep," sez Buck. Hank is th' worst woolie hater west of Cape Cod.

"Thanks, Buck," laughs Ricky. "Yuh never can tell what fate has in store fer yuh."

"Well," sez I, "if yo're waitin' fer Fate, I know right where he is. He resides about uh league—whatever that is—from th' alkali spring at th' foot of Tincup Gulch. He's uh sorrowin' son, and he looks fer his mate."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Pete Gonyer. "I know him, Ike. Ain't he uh specimen, eh? Dog-gone, he shore is th' craziest shepherd in seven States. Name's Wetherbee, and he's tendin' woolies fer Jim Foster, uh Camas. I been ridin' hard all day and my bronc is all in, but when he sees this crop uh whiskers he makes me pull leather to stay on. He informs me that he's lookin' fer his mate. Haw! Haw! Orates that his bride gits misplaced some way, and uh feller comes along and swipes her. His wau-wau ain't noways lucid. Jist uh plain nutty shepherd—no, he ain't plain either. Dog-gone, I reckon yuh might call him fancy."

Magpie walks over and looks out of th' window while th' rest of us celebrates th' birthday uh li'l more. Magpie, bein' th' sheriff, has to know when to quit. That's th' worst uh bein' an officer—it restricts uh feller's privileges.

"Boys," sez Magpie, pointin' out of th' window, "somethin' is now comin' into our young lives. Have uh look."

Th' only reason that nobody shot at his stovepipe hat was 'cause we all 'lowed he was uh preacher, and there was a closed season on sky-pilots in Piperock. He hops down off Art Miller's stage, stretches his long legs, wipes th' dust off his face and lopes over to th' saloon, where we're all crowdin' th' doorway.

"This animile," sez Magpie, "which we sees comin' our way, is either uh sky-pilot or uh seegar drummer. Don't shoot until after he either offers uh prayer er uh sample."

"Gentlemen," sez th' party of th' high hat, removin' said bonnet, and bowin' like somebody had yelled, "Salute yore pardners!" "I'm ahead of Oscuro."

"Good work!" applauds Ricky. "Tha's ex'lent. Is Oscuro uh sheriff or uh gamblin' de-vice?"

This feller puffs out his chest, slips one hand inside his vest jist over his heart, places his foot on th' step and announces—

"Oscuro is th' greatest livin' magician and handcuff manipulator."

"And you got ahead of him, eh?" grins Magpie. "I sort uh reckon yuh ain't so slow yoreself."

"I—uh see that you don't understand me. In sayin' that I'm ahead of Oscuro, I mean that I'm precedin' him to yore beautiful city. It is my pleasant duty to advertise his coming. While Oscuro is one of th' greatest living exponents of mystic art, he is the greatest manacle wizard of the age. Without any material aid he can remove from his wrists and ankles any and all kinds of manacles. Locks and bars have no terrors for Oscuro. He will offer a reward of one hundred dollars to any one who can produce a handcuff that he can not remove without a key. Later we will issue a challenge to your local peace officers.

"With him is Schubert, the musical wonder of Europe, master of all instruments, and last but not by any means least is Standing Grizzly Bear, the last of the Myopics. The latter is the greatest living medicine man. From herbs and roots he has evolved uh cure for all ills. With his simple remedy he can make th' blind see and th' deaf hear, and th' lame to walk. Gentlemen, these li'l pamphlets will tell you about it better than my poor tongue can."

He hands us uh bunch of printed sheets, and then canters back across th' street to th' hotel.

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"I could believe some of this stuff if that feller hadn't alluded to Piperock as bein' uh beautiful city," states Magpie. "Uh man's either uh danged liar or he's got uh motive when he makes uh statement like that."

"Beauty is only skin deep, Magpie," sez Pete. "Mebby this party sees beneath th' skin."

"Tha's right, Magpie, tha's right," grinned Ricky. "Beaú'ful li'l ol' Piperock. I shore hate to see 'er skinned by silk hats. Watch'm, sheriff. Le's all celebrate ol' man Henderson's son's birthday, eh? Good!"

THIS silk-hat person fades out, and four days later this aggregation shows up. They rides in on th' afternoon stage and we're out in force to meet 'em.

This Oscuro person looks uh heap like uh Greaser I used to know down near Yuma, but I know it ain't 'cause he's taller and meaner lookin', and besides I helped lynch that one at Yuma. There's this musical person and one Injun with Oscuro. This musical wonder walks uh heap like he'd spent uh few years in th' saddle, and so does Oscuro. I suppose people git that gait from ridin' jist fer fun. This Injun—Myopic tribe, I never heard of it before—looks uh heap like uh Flathead half-breed. I forms my own opinion right there of th' whole bunch.

"Herb doctor!" grunts Wick Smith, after th' bunch gits inside th' hotel. "Dog-gone it, Ike, all th' diggin' that Injun ever did was in garbage-cans or for camas root. They've got some of th' medicine in th' hotel there, which is called Marvelous Myopic. I gits hold of uh bottle and reads th' epitaph on th' label. Accordin' to th' writin' that stuff will cure anything from Maine to Valdez. Th' guarantee covers every degree of discomfort from dobie itch to th' bite of uh sidewinder, and it's got uh pitcher of Sittin' Bull, with th' bellyache, on th' label to prove th' allegation."

"All of which is uh delusion and uh snare," states Magpie wisely. "Accordin' to my figgerin' there ain't nothin' in th' world that is good for two things at once except hooch. Now, take hooch——"

"There still is wisdom left in Piperock!" exclaims uh voice behind us, which we recognizes as belongin' to Dirty Shirt Jones of Mica. "When uh man sez 'take hooch,' then I feels like I've met uh long-lost brother. Magpie, I'm with yuh from th' hondo to th' saddle-horn."

We greets Dirty Shirt in uh dignified manner and adjourns over to Buck's place to git out of th' sun.

Dirty Shirt is almost as big uh freak as Fate Wetherbee. He holes up in uh li'l dug-out near Mica and, so far as anybody knows, he has worn th' same shirt fer six years. It's been patched until there ain't one piece of th' original shirt left.

He's uh reward fiend. Not bein' able to read, every time he sees uh notice posted he immediately and soon goes out to inquire who th' reward is for. He lives in continual hopes of catchin' some notorious outlaw and gittin' enough reward to enable him to quit work. He don't like to have folks know he can't read.

"Somebody been cuttin' up didoes in th' country, Magpie?" he asks, after th' usual formalities.

"Not to my knowledge and observation. Why?"

"Well," sez Dirty Shirt, "I figgered mebby they had. I was ridin' across th' hills up Roarin' Cañon way, and I sees uh notice on uh tree near th' Hell Gate trail. Uh course I wa'n't near enough to read it. Jist sort a took it fer granted, and came in to help yuh if yuh needed uh good man fer uh posse, Magpie."

"Yo're welcome," sez Magpie. "Who did yuh think it was for?"

"Mebby Flint McAllister."

"Flint McAllister!" laughs Magpie. "You shore are after big game, ol'-timer. Don't worry about Flint. It's goin' to take uh hy-iu man to git that outlaw. He's worth about five thousand—countin' th' different rewards. Them were show-bills yuh saw, Dirty."

"Meanin' which?"

Magpie tells Dirty Shirt about Oscuro and his outfit.

"I knowed it, Magpie. I was 'way off th' road when th' stage went past, but I said to myself, 'Them's actor folks' th' minute I sees 'em."

Dirty wraps his thumb and finger around th' top of his glass so it will hold an extra kick or two, and reaches fer th' bottle.

"Bein' as you've spent most of yore life follerin' uh burro through th' sand of th' flats, or pesticatin' around th' tops of th' mountains, yuh shore ought to be uh judge

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thataway," laughs Magpie. "Yuh might be able to tell uh Chink from uh painted Injun, but that about lets yuh out, Dirty."

Dirty Shirt wipes his mustache on his sleeve and hitches up his belt.

"You ain't knowed me all my life, Magpie, so yuh can't edzactly go by what yuh opine. I said that them folks looks like actor folks and I ain't copperin' no bets. I works fer Pete Sellers oncet over in Broken Bow, where he runs th' Gem honkatonk. I plumb has to associate with them actors and actresses fer three mortal weeks, and by mighty, I reckon I shore ought to know th' breed."

"Dirty Shirt, I apologizes," sez Magpie. "Yo're competent to classify."

"I offers mine, too," states Buck. "While I don't speak up in uh bold manner like Magpie, I backs up Magpie's play down deep in my heart. How about you, Ike?"

I starts to reply that I bows to superior wisdom, but jist then this feller in th' trigger-itchin' hat, and this Oscuro person comes in.

"Gentlemen," sez this high-hatted hombre, "I fear that I've neglected you. I've been so busy coverin' th' country in my official capacity that I haven't had time to cultivate th' acquaintance of yore charmin' city. I am Redfield Mulford, and this is Oscuro." He bows and gently indicates th' Greaser, hoss-thief-lookin' party at his right.

"Charmed," sez Oscuro, bendin' in th' middle like his backbone was made of spliced crow-bars, and lookin' at Dirty Shirt like uh water-snake at a frog.

Oscuro has uh pair of eyes that, if I saw 'em when I was alone, I'd simply unhook with my six-gun and pray every time it jumped. Dirty Shirt swaps stare for stare fer uh minute or two and then puts his glass full of hooch in his pants pocket. He feels th' liquor trickle down his leg after awhile and it sort a wakes him up. He blinks his eyes and slides his hand toward his gun.

"Bartender, we will be served," sez Oscuro, shiftin' his eyes to Buck and smilin'.

"I—I—I'll be ——!" sez Dirty Shirt, lookin' down at his pants. "Who shoved this glass in my pocket?"

"You did," replied Buck. "I was jist wonderin' if yuh was tryin' to rustle my utensils."

Dirty Shirt put th' glass back gently on th' bar and looks around sort a foolish like.

"Mebby it's th' heat," he grunts. "I never done uh thing like that before. Mebby it's th' heat. I don't feel edzactly well."

"My friend," sez Mulford, "you needs some Marvelous Myopic for yore nerves."

Dirty Shirt turns and sees Oscuro lookin' at him, with half a smile on his lean face. Dirty makes one move and th' smile all goes out of Oscuro's eyes, 'cause no man smiles in th' muzzle of uh .45.

"Mister," sez Dirty Shirt through his shut teeth, "I ain't no freak! Mebby I don't take uh bath every Saturday night, and mebby th' two sides of my face ain't mates, but by th' mighty, muddy Missouri River, if you don't quit starin' at me I'll be th' last person yore eyes will ever behold! I'm plumb docile with my friends and am usually calm and considerate with strangers, but yuh riles me, mister, with yore starin'. *Sabe?* Yo're as welcome as uh Chinook wind to uh frozen calf, but don't confine yore attentions to Mister Jones of Mica. It ain't noways conductive to yore health."

Oscuro wets his lips, shuffles his feet nervous like and fusses with his collar.

"I—huh—I beg yore pardon, Mister Jones," sez he. "No offense, no offense, I hope. I—er—didn't mean to be—would you please not point that weapon at me any longer."

Dirty Shirt stares at his gun for uh minute and then shoves it back into th' holster.

"By th' mighty Yallerstone, what's th' matter with me? I never held uh gun that long before without havin' somebody on th' run fer th' coroner. I ain't myself a-tall. Reckon I'll go down to Jimmy Peyton's and git some ham and aigs. Jist think of it, Magpie; pull uh gun and hol' it like I would uh fish-pole! Might as well have uh four-year-ol' club in my hands!"

Dirty Shirt goes weavin' off down th' street, shakin' his head sorrowful like and we returns to th' bar.

"Powerful personality," sez Oscuro, crookin' his elbow.

"Uh-huh," grunts Magpie. "That hombre can look at yuh and tell what yore business is. Saw you folks on th' stage at half uh mile and knowed yuh was actors."

"That," sez Mulford, grinnin' into his glass, "is appreciated by our entire troupe."

"Mister Jones of Mica, to you I removes

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my tile," sez Oscuro. "Yo're uh wonder."

"Ike," sez Magpie, when we're amblin' over to our cabin, "them fellers seem to think that Dirty Shirt is some prognosticator. Pshaw, I never figgered that he was anythin' but uh common ol' sourdough."

"All of which bears out my favorite sayin', Magpie," sez I. "Jist because uh man is caught herdin' sheep, it ain't reasonable to opine that he never done uh stroke of honest work in his life."

"Them are true words, Ike," sez Magpie. "In spite of yore bein' handicapped in life by havin' uh small brain, you do speak wisely at times. I hope that nobody kills this Oscuro person before th' show comes off, 'cause I hankers fer entertainment."

I has my doubts. They've all got stovepipe hats, and that's agin' 'em. After postin' notices all over th' range there's bound to be uh lot uh people come who ain't civilized to any great extent, and silk hats shore do make restless six-guns.

Magpie and me are layin' on th' bunk, talkin' over th' show people, when uh shadow darkens th' door and we sits up.

"Howdy," sez th' shadow, "I wouldst fain relax my feet."

It's Fate Wetherbee—whiskers and all.

"Yuh wouldst, wouldst yuh?" laughs Magpie. "Come right in, ol'-timer, and relax your whole danged carcass."

"I give thee much thanks," sez Fate, floppin' down in our chair. "I wouldst inquire of th' entertainment this eve. Th' proclamations have appeared on th' hills of my flock and I wouldst seek knowledge of this Marvelous Myopic. Know ye of him, friends?"

Magpie tells him all about Oscuro—that is, all we know about him. Th' ol' rooster sits there like uh horned owl and nods his head all through th' discourse. When Magpie finishes, Fate hauls out his ol' pipe and smokes uh long time before he speaks.

" 'Tis uh mighty problem," sez he.

"Meanin' which?" I asks.

"A man rode out of th' north, and in his travels he met uh man from th' east, who wore uh head-dress favored of cannibals; and behold, they met and held converse, and a certain person lingerin' in th' mesquite didst hear and take notice. I am a son of sorrow. *Hyas kiwa.*"

Th' ol' man takes th' lid off th' stove, knocks th' ashes out of his pipe, and, without sayin' another word, ambles off down-town.

"Pine squirrel's delight," sez I.

Magpie scratches his chin and watches th' ol' rooster until he's out of sight.

"Son of sorrow, eh? Pore ol' devil! Ike, that's what uh feller gits fer tryin' to drown his troubles in sheep. Some take to mild stimulants like hooch and poppy-juice, but uh man is mighty hard hit when he gits th' sheep habit. '*Hyas kiwa*' sez he. That means there's somethin' rotten in Denmark. Mebby he's havin' hallu—hallu—well, seein' things what ain't."

UH LI'L later me and Magpie drifts down-town. There's quite uh crowd on th' street, and we sees Dirty Shirt and Fate talkin' confidential like, over by th' hitch-rack, and Magpie remarks:

"I reckon I'd better keep my eyes on that pair tonight. Dirty Shirt ain't got no more sense than Fate, and between them two they'd bust up th' battle of Waterloo."

"When uh crazy shepherd and uh fool sourdough gits their heads together it's about time fer honest folks to form uh defensive alliance," I agrees.

"Ain't it th' truth?" sez Wick Smith, who hears my remarks. "Cripes! That shore is one loco couple. They comes over to my store uh while ago and looks th' hull stock over some careful like. They pokes all around, but refuses to tell me what they requires. Finally Dirty Shirt locates th' article, and ol' Fate and him are some tickled. What do yuh reckon it was, Magpie? Flatirons! Honest to grandma! Them things what Chinks use to smooth boiled shirts with. Had ten of 'em in stock ever since I buys th' place, and they buys 'em all. Dirty Shirt takes 'em over to th' blacksmith shop and knocks th' handles off. After watchin' the pair, I changes my opinion that Siwashes buyin' hearses fer Sunday rigs is th' limit in craziness."

"Yuh can shore copper th' bet that they're goin' to start uh laundry and play trouble across th' board," sez Magpie, and then we goes into Buck's place and horns into uh game uh draw, jist to while away th' time.

We ain't whiled much of it away, when in comes Oscuro and th' Mulford person. They asserts their friendship by callin' up th' house, and Fate and Dirty Shirt smells th' invitation from outside.

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"Gentlemen," sez Oscuro, sizin' us all up with them black eyes, "I am goin' to ask uh favor. I feel shore that in yore midst is uh man who would be willin' to act as uh subject for my demonstration this evenin'. I could use one of my own troupe, but some would think it a fake if I did not use a local subject. Will some one volunteer?"

He looks hard at Dirty Shirt, but Dirty ain't lookin' at him a-tall; he's polishin' th' butt of his six-gun with th' palm of his hand, and lookin' at th' floor.

"Fate might do," laughs Buck.

Fate has been lookin' steady at Oscuro ever since he saw him, and when Buck makes this remark, Fate slips his hand inside his dirty ol' flannel shirt and steps close to Oscuro.

"What would you have of Fate?" he asks.

"My man," sez Oscuro, "I don't wish to tell the crowd what is in store for them this evenin', so I would rather have you go over to the hotel with me where I can outline it in private."

Fate looks steady like at Oscuro for uh minute and then turns to Dirty Shirt.

"*Tahtlelum—lakit kiuatan,*" sez he, deep down in his throat.

"*Kloshe!*" grunts Dirty, and goes right on polishin' his gun-handle and studyin' th' floor, while Fate ambles across th' street behind Mulford and Oscuro.

Me and Magpie cashes in our chips and walks outside.

"Ten—four hosses," mumbles Magpie, translatin' Fate's Chinook. "Now, Ike, I wonder what he meant? Four hosses, eh? 'Good!' sez Dirty Shirt. Good what? Aw, I suppose it's jist th' ramblin' of uh pair of loco brains. If that pair tries to pull anythin' tonight I'll—hello, Sam! What yuh doin' down this way—come to th' show?"

"Jist dropped in, Magpie. Hello, Ike, how's tricks?"

It's Sam Gardner, manager of th' Golden Harp Mine, at Mica. Th' Harp is one of th' biggest producers in th' State.

"Come down to see th' show?" asks Magpie again.

"Yuh might say I did," sez Sam. "I reads th' notices as I rides down. Quite a crowd in town, eh? Thirsty?"

There shore was some crowd to th' show. I reckon that Mulford person shore posted that whole range, and range folks shore do hanker to be entertained. Ol' man Thatcher and his two boys comes in from their place about twenty mile above th' ol' town uh Yaller Hoss, and th' ol' man is plumb disgusted to find out that there ain't goin' to be no dance. Yuh can't blame him, 'cause him and th' boys brings in their music utensils, and it ain't no cinch carryin' uh bull-fiddle on th' deck of uh half-broke bronc.

Half Mile Smith and Sourdough Smith are there from Curlew. Hank Padden comes over from th' Seven-A, and brings all his punchers, and so does Johnny Myers of th' Triangle. In fact she looks like everybody in Yaller Rock County hankers to be amused.

Dirty Shirt gits me to hol' uh seat fer him, 'cause he's goin' to be uh li'l late gittin' in. Th' odds are ag'in' me, but I holds it in spite of heavy opposition. As uh result, Sourdough has to take uh seat behind uh post, where he has to crook his neck to see th' stage, and seats retails at two dollars and four bits each.

"Sourdough is shore livin' up to his rep!" yells Swede Johnson from across th' room. "He even goes into ambush to see uh show. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Sourdough jumps to his feet, and reaches for his hip.

"You long-jointed, mule-faced——"

Splinter McFee, who weighs two hundred and thirty-five and rides uh twenty-inch tree, reached up, put his hand on Sourdough's shoulder and pulls down. Sourdough slams back into his seat and hunches up.

"Well," sez he, "jist to show yuh I ain't no roughneck like Swede Johnson, I'll be gentleman enough to overlook the remark."

"Sourdough shore has great control of his temper," laughs Half Mile.

Magpie stands up and faces th' crowd.

"Gents," sez he, "for oncet in yore ornery lives be peaceful. I comes here to be entertained, and, bein' as th' coroner is over to Helena, I've got to 'tend to his duties, and I shore objects to any extra work. *Sabe?*"

"I'm with yuh, Magpie," sez Slim Hawkins. "I'm fer peace at any price."

"Slim," sez Magpie, "I've knowed you fer years, and yore daddy before yuh. Sit down!"

I reckon there would have been an argument started, but jist then th' curtain goes up and everybody sets down. Out comes Mister Shubert, and I'll say this much for

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that hombre—he shore could play. He plays on uh lot uh different utensils and ends up by playin' uh overgrown Dutch pipe, th' music of which sounds like uh man down uh prospect hole with wooden teeth—th' man, of course. He plays th' bull-fiddle better than ol' man Thatcher, fer th' reason that th' ol' man plays by ear, and, bein' uh li'l deef, don't ride close to th' tune.

After he gits through Oscuro comes out. He invites Buck Masterson, Pete Gonyer and Ricky Henderson up on th' stage as sort of uh committee to see that he don't pull no crooked stuff.

"Ladies and gentlemen," sez he, "I am goin' to show yuh that th' hand is quicker than th' eye. Watch me closely."

He walks to th' front of th' stage, pulls up his sleeve and shows us that his hand is empty. Then he turns and pulls uh deck uh cards out of Pete Gonyer's nose. Pete swallers hard and looks at th' cards.

"Cripes!" sez he, while th' crowd laughs. "I never knowed they was in there."

Oscuro reaches over again and pulls uh twenty-dollar gol'-piece out of Pete's eye and holds it up.

"I suppose yuh didn't know yuh had that either, eh?" and puts it in his pocket.

Th' hand is quicker than th' eye. I sees Pete make uh short move with his right, and his six-gun is givin' Oscuro's middle vest button th' once over.

"Thanks," sez Pete. "Yuh can keep th' cards."

Oscuro starts to splutter, but catches th' look on th' faces of th' committee and thinks better of it. He motions th' bunch back to their seats. On th' stage he's got uh li'l striped tent rigged up, and he goes over and lifts th' sides to show that she's empty.

"As my notices proclaim," sez he, "I will now demonstrate my power over locks and knots. I hope that yore sheriff has taken up my challenge."

"Both ways from th' jack," states Magpie, anglin' his way up to th' platform. "We're uh li'l shy on handcuffs—only havin' two pair—but I reckon we can throw enough diamond hitches, Lone Jacks and squaw hitches to keep yuh interested. I'd like to have Ike Harper, Cobalt Williams and Slim Hawkins to help in th' operation."

Th' three of us ambles up and proceeds on th' job with great cheer. We uses th' two pair uh handcuffs, and then we ties that hombre some plentiful to his chair. It was some artistic job uh ropin', if yuh ask me, and then we slides him into his li'l tent and lets down th' sides.

Five minutes was th' time-limit, and by cripes, he still had thirty seconds to spare when he walks out with th' ropes and cuffs in his hands and uh smile on his face. Th' irons ain't been unlocked, and th' knots are still in place.

"It jist natcherally ain't human nor safe," sez Sourdough, turnin' around to me. "Th' sooner uh feller like him is hung th' better."

Differences of opinion as to how it's done is jist about to bust into real trouble, but Oscuro holds up his hand fer silence.

"Gentlemen," sez he, lookin' at his watch, "leave th' arguments until after th' performance. I will now proceed to perform th' greatest feat of them all."

He motions toward th' rear of th' room, and down th' aisle comes Fate Wetherbee—whiskers and all—and gits up on th' stage.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" howls Pete Gonyer. "Look out, mister! If yuh ever gits tangled in them whiskers you'll shore need help to git loose."

"Coarse wit is th' safety-valve of fools," sez Fate, lookin' down at Pete, and th' crowd backs th' shepherd's play.

I looks at my watch and it's fifteen minutes to ten.

"Now," sez Oscuro, "I want th' same gentlemen to come forward and put th' ropes and manacles on Mister Wetherbee. I am goin' to have him securely bound and placed in th' cabinet, and I am goin' to release him at a distance."

He gives us uh long oration about th' power of mind over matter, and states that he's goin' to release Fate thataway. He orates that he wants perfect quiet and patience fer fifteen minutes, as it takes him that long to perform th' stunt. No one is to be on th' stage except th' shepherd in his tent, and he asks us to please not leave th' hall under any consideration.

We shore did ourselves proud in th' ropin'-game this time. I reckon it would have taken any one of us fifteen minutes to untie them knots with our hands, and I shore has my doubts about any man's mind havin' any loosenin' effects on them hitches.

WELL, we sits there plumb silent fer fifteen or twenty minutes, but there was no sign of Fate comin' out

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of th' tent. Meanwhile Oscuro left the hall.

"I reckon it's some chore wishin' them ropes off," remarked Johnny Myers out loud.

"Mebby Oscuro didn't figger that he had uh shepherd to release," laughs Magpie. "There's only one kind of spirits that work on uh— Wow!"

Magpie's discourse broke off and th' whole audience turns to look out th' door. Somethin' shore was doin' out in th' street. Yuh could hear somebody swearin' like uh mule skinner. Somebody yelped and uh bronc bawled and we gits uh Wild West show with all th' trimmin's. Th' door, which was wide enough to drive uh team through, has been open all evenin', and th' next thing we knowed in comes two broncs and sunfishes right down th' middle aisle.

Rickety smash! Th' leadin' bronc, uh wall-eyed pinto from th' Triangle, pitches into uh heap of empty chairs, and its rider, which is known as Oscuro, turns over in th' air, stands on his face on th' stage fer uh second and then slides right under th' tent where ol' Fate is waitin' to be unhitched.

Br-r-r-rip! Th' other bronc opines that he's uh hurdler and pitches across uh row of chairs, and its rider cuts uh half-circle in th' atmosphere and lands all spraddled out on top of Judge Steele. It is Mister Schubert. He shore can play, but when it comes to ridin' he don't harmonize a-tall.

"Look out!" yells somebody near th' door, and th' third hoss makes its entrance. That one don't come clear in. Its name is Twister, and belongs to Weinie Lopp of th' Seven-A. I reckon it jist came in where it could see to git uh toe-hold, 'cause it jist swaps ends once, high and handsome, and we observes Chief Standin' Grizzly, th' last of th' Myopics, give an exhibition of how far uh Montana outlaw can heave an Injun. I reckon th' Siwash would have went higher but th' ceilin' won't permit of any altitude records, so he had to alight.

When he goes up he has uh sack or somethin' in his hand, which he releases at th' top of his flight, and said sack describes uh loop and comes down powerful heavy on th' head of one Half Mile Smith. Th' Sandman visits th' Smith family.

Th' fourth hoss don't come in a-tall. It stops at th' door, but its rider, which looks uh heap like Mister Mulford, comes right along in and proceeds to demonstrate uh head spin down th' aisle, hangin' on to uh sack which bumps and rattles along behind like uh derailed car on th' end of uh freight train.

"Funny thing!" sez I, standin' on uh chair and lookin' over th' livestock, which seem uh heap embarrassed to find themselves amid th' bright lights. "Them broncs are th' pick of th' country as ornery buckers, and I don't *sabe* what this show party wants to pull off uh buckin' contest for. It ain't advertised."

"Nor refined," agrees Magpie.

Jist then all eyes are turned to th' stage. There's Dirty Shirt dancin' like uh Piegan, with uh knife and uh coil uh rope in his hand, and yellin' at th' top of his voice:

"Soak th' son of uh sea cook, Fate! Wow! Who says uh shepherd can't fight! Yeo-o-o-ow!"

Out from under th' tent comes uh swearin', spittin', scratchin' bundle of humanity, which we observes is Oscuro and Fate. Fate still wears th' handcuffs, but Dirty is carryin' th' ropes. First Oscuro is on top and then Fate. Talk about revolutions of uh circle-saw. Fate has got his whiskers buried in Oscuro's face, and he's workin' both hands fast and frequent into Oscuro's stomach.

"And—behold—I—huh—am sorrowful—huh—no longer!" we hears Fate yell between puffs, as him and Oscuro spins over to th' edge of th' stage.

Dirty Shirt gits excited and forgets where he is, and when Oscuro and Fate makes their last revolution they takes Dirty Shirt with them off th' stage and under th' heels of that lop-eared roan outlaw from th' Seven-A.

Right then, what Half Mile calls "Uh Recess in Hell" begins to happen. Every one uh them broncs begins to feel th' call of th' wild, and wishes to leave th' bright lights and flesh-pots and hie forth to bunch grass and solitude, and they ain't noways polite in their exits. About th' time them broncs git organized and on their way, I sees Half Mile Smith's head arise above his chair. He stands up, and in his hand is th' sack which lulled him to slumber. He proceeds to rub his head and look into th' sack.

I'm grinnin' when he catches my eye. I don't know why I grinned. I've seen men grin at sudden death, but it shore wasn't 'cause they was pleased much. Anyway, it

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peeved Half Mile, but he misses me and hits Sourdough.

It don't knock him out of his seat. There's uh dull *clank!* when it connects with Sourdough's head, and he jist shivers. Pretty soon he opens his mouth—

"*Nesika papa klaksta mitlite*——"

"Sweet, ain't it," sez Magpie, takin' off his hat and mine, too. "That's th' first time I've ever had th' pleasure of seein' uh man git hit so hard that he recites th' Lord's Prayer in Chinook, Ike. This shore is uh real entertainment."

"People," sez Dirty Shirt, crawlin' out of th' mess in front of th' stage, and holdin' up his hand, "if somebody don't pry that shepherd loose pretty soon I shudders for Oscuro. I tried it—I'm through!"

Unless uh neckband and one cuff can be patched so as to make up uh shirt it shore is up to Dirty Shirt to make uh purchase. We stampedes over and hauls Fate off his victim. Oscuro ain't what I'd call uh presentable personage. His shirt is torn plumb off, and his face is promiscuous like on his head.

"Look," howls Fate, pointin' at Oscuro, with his handcuffed hands. "Look at his bosom! I knew it before I saw th' sign. It availeth th' wicked nothin' when they flee before fate! See th' mark?"

"Looks like uh brand," states Magpie, lookin' close. "Wait! Cross-L! Oscuro—By cripes, it's Mexican Allard! What do yuh know about that! He's worth five thousand in Wyoming, dead or alive. That brand is uh memento of that outfit's displeasure of his ability with uh cinch ring."

"I reckon," sez Dirty Shirt, tearin' that neckband and cuff off and tossin' 'em to one side, "I'll take uh rest on that piece uh change."

"Yuh might buy uh shirt, too," sez Ricky Henderson.

Jist then some more commotion starts near th' door.

"Sheriff!" yells uh voice. "Where's th' sheriff? Hey, Magpie!" And here comes ol' man Whittaker, th' banker, down th' hall like uh scared steer.

"Dog-gone it," he wails, "while everybody's here gawpin' at th' show, th' bank has been robbed! Git uh posse! Git somethin'! I tell yuh th' gold from th' Harp has been stolen!"

"How about this," yells Dirty Shirt, holdin' up th' article which Half Mile tried to assassinate me with.

"Dog-gone!" whoops Whittaker, grabbin' th' sack. "Where did this come from? Dog-gone, I'll have to——"

He pulls out th' contents. Flat-irons!

"Sufferin' sidewinders!" he gasps. "Laundry tools!"

"Th' same of which never were amalgamated at th' Golden Harp," states Gardner foolishly.

"Here's some more," sez Pete Gonyer, takin' th' other sack from th' unresistin' hand of Mister Mulford, who is slumberin' peacefully with his head through th' legs of uh busted chair.

Magpie looks at th' irons and then takes th' ropes away from Dirty Shirt.

"It might be uh handy thing to put hobbles on this bunch while they're still sleepin'," sez he. "I don't *sabe* this performance uh particle, but we can apologize uh lot better than we can repent."

Oscuro starts to git up on his feet, but Dirty pokes his gun in Oscuro's face, and he drops back.

"Better lay still," opines Dirty. " 'Dead or alive' shore don't leave any doubts, and I'm shore goin' to collect th' bounty on you."

"Friends," sez Fate, "am I to be deprived of my revenge? This Oscuro person, known to me as Jim Bowers, is th' man who stole my gold and my wife. Let me take him out to my hills. 'An eye for an eye and uh tooth for uh tooth.' "

"All of which you've collected with interest," states Dirty Shirt. "Only yuh didn't stop at one tooth. Yuh don't make no shepherd out of this hombre, Mister Wetherbee. He's my grub stake, *sabe?*"

Oscuro hunches himself into an easier position and tries to grin, as he painfully states:

"As to th' whereabouts of yore wife, Fate, I'd also be glad to know. She annexed my roll and left me on th' rocks in Phœnix, two years ago."

"Th' knowledge of which takes th' sting from memory's hornet," sez Fate, with th' first grin I ever seen on his face. It wasn't exactly uh grin. The whiskers jist widened uh li'l. And then he turns to th' crowd and waves his arms. "I am no longer uh son of sorrow, and I am weary of mutton. Kismet."

"All of which don't explain nothin',"

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states Magpie. "Bein' as Fate talks like uh scratched phonygraft record, we'll jist call on Mister Jones to elucidate this Wild West celebration, and also th' meanin' of these laundry utensils."

Dirty Shirt picks up uh flat-iron and grins at th' crowd.

"This," sez he, "is th' latest in fool's gold. In uh sack she shore does resemble gold bars—especially at night in uh rush."

"Here's th' which of it: Ol' Fate is shadin' hisself in th' shade of uh mesquite, when Mister Mulford meets uh puncher in th' Medicine hills. They has uh talk, th' same of which is about th' gold from th' Harp mine. They makes all their plans right there. It's all been figgered out long ago, but they makes it definite. Someway, this puncher knows th' time."

"They figgers to git everybody in th' country to come to th' show, and while it's goin' on this puncher is to bust th' safe, after placin' four extra broncs at th' hitch-rack, and cuttin' every other hoss in town loose. That shore eliminates any posse. Their plans was to vamoose while th' crowd was waitin' fer th' subject to git released under th' tent."

"All I did was to eliminate th' puncher, after he'd busted th' safe, and give them th' flat-irons. I jist popped him on th' head with uh loaded quirt."

"I'd remark that they shore picked some broncs fer their getaway," laughs Weinie Lopp. "That Twister hoss is——"

"I done all that pickin'," sez Dirty Shirt. "I knowed they won't go far. I sez to myself——"

"Behold!" yells Fate, pointin' to th' door, and we observes th' daddy of all woful persons.

It's standin' there, weavin' and weavin', with its shirt almost tore off, and th' belt of its shape is busted, and hangin' down around its knees. It ain't got no hat, and th' face of it seems to have come in contact with uh rough obstacle. It has uh six-gun in each hand but dón't seem strong enough to more than hol' onto them guns.

"Who—who—who in —— tied them ropes across th' street?" it manages to ask, like th' croak of th' last frog on earth. "I —I—I hit it and——"

This bunch of wo slides to th' floor in uh loose heap and sleeps.

"I figgered he would if he tried to git away," laughs Dirty Shirt. "Them other broncs wouldn't jump it, so they jist had to come inside to have room to perform. Th' gold is piled on th' sidewalk outside, Mister Whittaker."

Magpie leans over this busted bunch of humanity, and then turns to Dirty Shirt and Fate, with uh grin, and removes th' handcuffs from Fate and puts 'em on th' sleepin' figger before he sez:

"I reckon you can buy another clean shirt, Dirty, and Fate can git uh hair-cut, too. This is Flint McAllister!"

"Five thousand more!" yells Buck Masterson. "Th' danged fools left Flint McAllister out there with all that gold, with nothin' but uh rope across th' street to keep him from gittin' away, and——"

"Two ropes, Buck," corrects Dirty. "I didn't know which way he was intendin'to go, and I wanted to see th' fun inside."

"And that li'l rope," whispers Wick Smith wonderin'ly, "stopped th' worst outlaw in Montana. Yuh shore can't beat——"

"Fate and a fool," finishes Oscuro, lookin' down at his trussed-up carcass. "I recognized Fate, and left him *hors de combat*, but——"

"Like all wise men," finishes Magpie, "yuh plumb overlooked th' fool."

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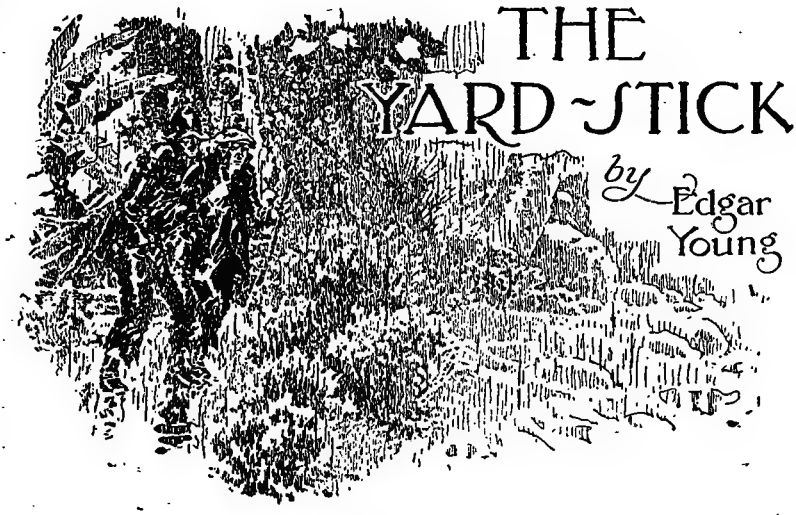

THE YARD-STICK

by Edgar Young

I WASN'T looking for a pal when I met up with Eugene Rodin. I was sick of pals. The last man I had put in with handed me a double-cross back in Mazatlan and I hit the trail for Guadalajara alone with a vow in my heart never again to pal with another. I was through with them, the whole dirty pack of them.

Some had been unable to tote fair when poverty pinched. I remembered grimly the fact that Babe Benson had sneaked away and smoked the last cigaret. Broke, hungry, cold and wet we were that night, too, beating it out of Edmonton for Calgary. And Babe Benson held out the last cigaret. It wasn't the worth of the pill, mind you; it was the principle of the thing. We struck a good job in Calgary but I split with him over that.

One and all they had failed me. Some had failed during prosperity. Some when we were down on the rocks. Some looked into a woman's eyes and turned around to double-cross me. Red Hawkins told a girl we both thought pretty well of that I was a professional polygamist, and she told me.

That's the way it had been. No wonder I was sick of them. Now I like a good pal. A man needs one rambling around from pillar to post—some one to blow into strange places with, some one to talk to and tie to when things are coming rough, some one to trust as you trust yourself, some one to stick up for and have stick up for you—oh well, just a pal.

Perhaps I was finicky. I expected a lot of a pal. I wanted one that could wear a clawhammer or rags and fit in where fate shoved him as if he belonged there, a pal who could and would be true blue under any and all circumstances. Of course he must be a man marked before birth by the gipsy hand. Good streaks some of them had had, but one and all they had failed me. And hiking along the dusty trail toward Guadalajara I decided I wanted no more of them. Better be alone than with some one you do not trust implicitly.

Money I had. An even thousand in American currency reposed in a money belt under my shirt and a few hundred dobie Mexican dollars were in a pouch in my blanket roll, besides various *reales* in my pockets. I was well heeled for I had hung on to myself back there in Mazatlan where two hundred-dollar-a-month jobs were going begging.

Daily the stage-coach passed me with its ten galloping mules yet I had walked. Through Rosario, Escuinapa, Presidio, Acaponeta I wandered leisurely. And I had arrived in Tepic, in the territory of the same name, when I ran across this Eugene Rodin.

HE WAS standing in the door of the Bola de Oro when I went in. He wandered in behind me and watched me throw off my blanket-roll, and out of the corner of my eye I saw him regard it critically while I registered. I mistook him for an inquisitive Yellow Belly.

I turned and looked at him sneeringly. He wasn't a large man. In fact, he was a

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trifle undersized, and his face was tanned by the sun until he was as dark as a Mex. Moreover he was dressed like a well-to-do don.

I was just on the point of saying something sarcastic when he walked over to me.

"Friend," he said, "I'd like to know if Old Moose Pasture John is still running the Sour Dough's Delight in Dawson yet?"

You could have knocked me over with a feather. I stammered out that Old Moose Pasture had sold out to a Seattle Dutchman before I left Dawson four years ago. I winked at the blanket-roll and at Rodin. A man does not learn how to put up an overall pack outside of Alaska and my roll had tipped me off; so we shook hands and became acquainted.

I dolled up and we saw the sights together. He was a good sport. There was nothing chinchy about the way he spent his money. He knew when his turn came and he kept his end up to a hair.

So I hung around Tepic for several days. We took long walks through the city and out into the *fincas* or lounged in the *patio* of the hotel and we talked of things far removed from Tepic and its people. He was about my own age, hard bitten of the wanderlust, so we had food a plenty for conversation.

"Where are you thinking of going to from here?" he asked one night casually.

When I told him I was headed in the general direction of Panama he allowed he was going as far as Guadalajara and if I had no objection he would accompany me that far. He specified *that far* a time or two and I was relieved to hear it for as well as I liked Eugene Rodin I still held in mind my resolution to travel alone.

We hiked together to Ixlan and from there we went muleback to San Marcos and into Guadalajara on the train. We put up at "The Francés" and lolled around a few days. He said nothing about going any further until I made preparations to depart; then he mentioned that he thought he would go on over to the city of Mex. with me. So we blew into the ancient capital of the Aztecs together.

I STUDIED Eugene Rodin pretty closely. At times I caught him sizing me up. There was something he was holding back with, something lurking in his eyes that I could not read. With money in our jeans he had been all that could be desired.

I thought ruefully how I had been fooled in the past. Other men I had started out with had been just as square when we both had money. But when we were down so far on the ragged edge that our own mothers would have hesitated before speaking to us their yellow streaks had shown up. Self-preservation had loomed bigger to them than the obligations of friendship.

I knew in my heart that I needed a man like Eugene Rodin, if he *was* true blue, and that he needed a man like me. He, as well as myself, had no one depending on him. He was footloose and free as was I.

So I pondered the matter of nights and at last I decided if he did travel with me and wanted to be a pal to me I would try him by all the tests that had caused the others to fail. And more. I would test him and try him as no other man had been tested and tried by another.

"Say, Rody," I told him the morning after I came to this conclusion, "I'm getting down pretty low financially. I've got to be moving along toward Panama."

He gave me a queer look and that something that was lurking in his brain came into his eyes for a swift instant and was gone.

"About how many dobies have you got left, Sandy?" he inquired.

I turned my pockets out and counted ninety pesos. He turned his out and found he had a hundred and four. He pushed seven of them over to me.

"Now we both have ninety-seven," he stated.

Yes, we both had ninety-seven, but I had a thousand dollars American money in my belt that he did not know about.

I felt ashamed to think how I was holding out on him. I was under cover. The first time in my life, I had gone under cover with a friend.

"Guess I might as well take that trip to Panama with you," he volunteered.

We set out the next morning. We bought a fourth-class ticket to Cordoba. It's cheaper to pay fourth-class than to hobo. From Cordoba we went fourth-class to San Geronimo on the Tehuantepec road. We topped one over to Gamboa and from there, which is the junction of the Pan-Americano, we got a gringo conductor to carry us in his caboose to Tapachula and from there we

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hiked to Cavallo Blanco, Guatemala, and paid our fare into the capital.

In Guatemala City we went broke. We found out that the trail for Tegucigalpa left from Morales on the Northern Railroad so we pawned a few of our belongings in a *monte de piedad* and went down there. Now we were getting down to business. The broker we got the better I felt. I was soon to know about this man Eugene Rodin. We were getting on the tramp fast. And me with a thousand cold dollars in my belt!

We took the trail from Morales station. At Nigger Knight's placer mine we sold our belongings down to absolute necessities. We bought cheap feeds from roadside peons and slept in our blankets at night. Yes, we managed to exist to Tegucigalpa. To exist! And me with a thousand bones in my money belt.

You see I was obsessed to try this man. I was going to find out how much it took before his yellow streak began to crop out! Tom Sinclair had stood more than Rodin had stood thus far before he went to pieces and left me stranded in C. P. Diaz.

But Rodin and I were getting on the rocks fast. We begged a few meals in Tegucigalpa. I feared we would meet up with some large-hearted American who would stake us heavily so I suggested that we hasten.

Rodin was not averse to this, so we stepped out fast and furious for Managua. When we got there we were almost down to the stage I wished to see us. We were tatterdemalions; yet Rodin took matters with the cool philosophy of a born adventurer. His nerve was holding out well. In fact, I was hard put to keep from showing worry. But I was not yet through with testing Eugene Rodin.

We rounded up a few stray feeds in Managua and put out across the hills for Costa Rica. When we arrived in Limon the rainy season had begun. It rained incessantly.

The long trail hiking had told physically upon Rodin. His face was pinched and his belt was taken in to the last hole and several extras he had surreptitiously punched with his knife. But his eyes had a flinty glint and his lean jaws were set like a steel trap.

It made me sore and caused me to bow my neck like a mad bull. He had gone through enough to make any man give up and cry enough. I would have forgiven him, for he had shown remarkable nerve.

When we arrived in Limon he had been through more than any of the rest of my past pals. Yet there was a challenge in those flinty eyes and that something I could not ferret out kept lurking in his brain.

IF THE trail was long and hard into Limon, how am I to describe it from Limon to the Panama boundary? I have said it rained incessantly. I was wrong. It poured. Day and night it poured from the sky. Twenty-four hours a day without ceasing it fell upon us.

Three miles south of Limon the government guards at Bananita River told us we could not pass. We did not go back. We went up the river instead.

Eighteen miles we broke through the dense jungle along the river bank before we could find a bridge, and eighteen miles we floundered down the other side. Thirty-six miles in the rain to get a quarter of a mile! We found out later from Jim Brown how far it was. Yet it seemed like a hundred. All the afternoon and all night we floundered and at eight o'clock the next morning we could look back across the river and see the hut of the guards.

Our blankets were sopping wet and felt like lead, so we threw them down. We would not need them in Panama. Panama was our next stop—six hundred miles to the south.

We walked the beach to Puerto Viejo. The matted jungle met the sea on a sharp line, and often we were in water to our armpits to get by a particularly dense mass of jungle. But we had to leave the sea coast. It was on account of the points and capes jutting out. At Alahuita we walked ten miles out a sharp point and back on the other side. When we got back we could hear the roar of the sea just across at the place where we had started. We didn't know it until we got back there. We could have won our way through the jungle in five minutes had we known. But we didn't know and we walked twenty miles.

Our shoes played out entirely, went to pieces from the water and from the strenuous hiking. Our coats were a dead weight on our backs. We flung them away. We knew we would have to lighten down to the last ounce if we made Panama. My trousers were in rags below the knees from the sawtooth grass and vines. I took my knife

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and stagged them at the knees. Rodin grinned grimly and cut his off likewise.

We were now dressed in shirt and knee breeches. We had nothing else. Our hats had long since fallen by the wayside. Yet I had a thousand dollars American currency in a clammy belt around my middle. It was tragic, yet it had to be done. And I hoped in my heart that Eugene Rodin would come through it all true blue.

We left the sea at Puerto Viejo and headed southeast through the jungle. At every mile it grew denser. We were getting deeper and deeper into the tropics.

Saw grass and small sharp-edged palm leaves tore into our few clothes and bit into our flesh like knives. The pain was not so bad the first few days, but the cuts began to get infected. Tiny yaws appeared and soon became eating tropical sores that pained and throbbed and did not heal.

Mosquitoes had been bothering us all the way from Managua and we were both carrying a temperature from malaria, but now they began to punish us frightfully. They literally swarmed on us in clouds. We could kill them on any part of our bodies by handfuls.

Our faces became so swollen and black that our own mothers would not have recognized us. Every step forward was an effort that cost us the most exquisite pain, yet we went forward upon the sheer force of our wills—not our wills of themselves alone but the will of the white man who is absolute, that had been handed down to us from our lean-jawed ancestors.

We did not speak much together. It was too much of an effort to voice our thoughts.

I scarcely looked at him. It took the most of my time to peer out the way for my feet through my tiny slits of eyes that were swollen out like knobs upon my face. Yet I knew he was always close by, at my side or before or behind. We sensed each other there. Often I put out my hand to aid him when he stumbled and many times he clutched me when I reeled dizzily.

Thus we broke through the jungle for mile upon weary mile.

We fell and slept through pure exhaustion where darkness overtook us. Back to back we lay with our knives open and clasped in our hands. Too dead tired to know by our usual senses when danger threatened, yet atavistic senses long buried in ourselves and our ancestors sprouted within us so that we sprang wide awake when real danger threatened, and clutched our knives and snarled our wrath at prowling forest denizens.

It poured down upon us yet we slept and felt refreshed. We fed as we traveled, as our primitive ape ancestors had done, and found a keen relish in juicy roots, berries, and palm shoots.

And then we came to a great rushing river that we had heard roaring miles away. I knew this from the geography I had studied in school as the Sexola. It marked the northern boundary of the Republic of Panama. We were half way from Limon to the Zone. The Canal Zone was yet three hundred miles away.

My fever was high. Fools that we were we had brought no quinine. I was burning alive with the fever. I caught myself talking out loud when I thought I was merely thinking.

"The Canal!" I screamed insanely.

"The Canal it is pal," replied Rodin, although his voice was almost quenched in his lungs.

We plunged into the Sexola and swam side by side. The current carried us downstream for a mile or so before we were able to make the crossing. We were so utterly exhausted from the effort of breasting the current that we could scarcely crawl from the water upon the opposite bank. The Zone three hundred miles away seemed a million.

"Let's take a nap, pal," I whispered weakly. "Maybe when we wake up we will be able to travel better."

"Don't you worry, Sandy, we'll make it all right," he told me.

And I cursed myself between spells of delirium for having brought Eugene Rodin to such a pass.

WHEN I awoke I was in a strange place. Everything appeared dazzling white. I struggled to spring to my feet yet I did not have the strength.

"At last," I said to myself, "the jungle has claimed me."

Fool that I had been I had played with fire. I had carried the thing too far. I thought of Rodin and I babbled piteously.

"Lie quiet! You are all right now," came a gentle woman's voice.

I lay there quietly. That voice had filled my entire being. It was the most

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soothing sound I had ever heard. I think I lapsed unconscious again; but when I managed to open my eyes after a struggle that seemed to take hours, I stared up into a wonderful pair of brown eyes. I tried to focus my mind. At last a glimmer of intelligence came to me.

"Where's Rodin?" I managed to enunciate painfully.

"Rody is all right," she said, and then I knew she was a nurse. And then she added as if half to herself: "That's all you've been doing is raving about Rody. I've just told him that you are all right."

It was several days after this that I was able to sit up, days that I lapsed into frightful delirium and raved of never-ending tropical trails. And Eugene Rodin sat across from me in his bed and smiled wanly.

We pieced the story together, from the time we had lain down together on the bank of the Sexola. And we wondered at our rare luck. Shields, manager of the Union Fruit Company's plantations at Changenola, had happened to go up the river in his launch to look at some new banana land they were thinking of using and glancing idly along the shore had seen us huddled there in the rain. His first thought had been that we were corpses cast up by the river, but after he had put in and made an examination he had found we were alive and, moreover, that we were his own countrymen. He had bundled us in and turned his craft down the river and had us carried into the Union Company's hospital at Changenola.

This is where we were, and we were fast beginning to recuperate. The fever suddenly left us. Our yaws disappeared under the sanitary treatment we received. We were on the road to health.

Secretly I knew that I was well enough to be up and going. Yet we clung to the hospital. The reason was those brown eyes of which I have spoken. And blind as I was I did not notice for a time how Rodin's eyes lit up when she came in and how gloomy he looked when she went away for a time. But at last I did notice it and it gave me a distinct shock.

ONE MORNING after she had gone out—she did not remain with us continuously any more—Rodin looked across at me solemnly.

"Sandy," he said slowly, "she's wonderful and beautiful and everything that appeals to me away down in here—" he tapped himself over the heart—"but if you win her I'll go all the way for the both of you."

I put out my hand.

"Same here old pal, and may the best man win."

But something happened that same morning that caused us to resolve anew. Mr. Shields came in with an armful of clothes for each of us. And the bill was attached to each outfit. He had had them sent up from Colon on the boat. He also tossed a small package to me tied up in paper.

"You'll find it all right there," he said.

I had thought a few times of my money belt, which I noticed was missing from around my body, when I became conscious, but I had about decided that I had tossed it away during a fit of delirium on the trail. If I had done so it would have served me right for going under cover against a man like Rodin. But I knew now that the small package Shields had tossed me was my money belt with its contents.

I tossed it on the foot of the bed and thanked him. I was thinking of what to say to Rodin to explain to him why I had gone under cover. He also tossed a small package to Rodin. It occurred to me that it was some trinkets or other that Rodin had had upon his person when they had stripped us after bringing us in. I pondered these things while Shields was talking to us. But now I began to get interested in what he was saying. He placed his hand upon our nurse's shoulder and beamed upon us.

"Now, boys," he said jovially, "I've loaned you my wife as long as I can spare her." Rodin glanced at me meaningly. "She and I haven't been married very long, and every minute she is away from me seems like an hour. If you fellows hadn't been Americans I would have let some of the Jamaican boys nurse you back to health. I guess I would have done so anyhow if it hadn't been for her. She was a nurse in Ancon when I was steam-shovel foreman in the Culebra cut and she used to speak a lot of her career when I was persuading her to marry me. And she would have it no other way than she should act as your nurse. And now she pronounces you both as sound as a dollar."

She stood there blushing through it all like a schoolgirl.

I had been stupefied at first. You see I

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had to change my viewpoint. From a charming young lady to be wooed and won I came to see the pure gold of her heart, she the wife of the highest official of the Union Fruit Company there nursing a couple of vagabonds from her love of humanity only.

It got me away down deep and I began to thank them both; and when I ran out of words Rodin told them in words that brought the tears gushing from their eyes how much we appreciated their kindness. More, he tried to force the small package Shields had tossed him into her hands, murmuring to her to buy a present for herself. But she laughingly declined and, after asking us over to have lunch with them, they walked out arm in arm.

We began to don the habiliments of civilization. It was lucky I had the price to pay Shields before we left, I thought. We were indebted to him for enough as it was.

Rodin finished dressing before I did. He seated himself on the foot of the bed and took his small package and began to unroll it. He cleared his throat a couple of times and appeared embarrassed.

"Sandy," at last he said, "I don't want you to think hard of me. I've put in with many fellows in my time and I've had them hand me some pretty raw deals. I don't want you to think that I am in the habit of going under cover like I have done this time. I guess you and I understand each other pretty well now so I 'm going to come out from under cover. I've got ten one hundred bills here in United States money and I'm going to whack it fifty-fifty between us till you and I get some more to whack up."

I was afraid to speak for a moment. I did not wish to appear weak and sentimental for there was a big lump in my throat that was choking me. I fumbled at the wrappings on my money belt and tossed it over to him.

"Better count this in with it and there will be more to whack," said I.

This, men, is how I met up with Gene Rodin and proved him on the trail. And how he proved me. He had been under cover as well as myself, and that was what I had seen lurking in his eyes.

He would have been all right without this test, but how was I to know? I had picked him, the square one, to test out on account of all the phony ones that had gone before. But never again did I have to test him, though we roamed the seven seas together. He was more than a brother to me. He saved my life and my good name. He kept me from tobogganing into hell. He was there with a cheery word and a hand on my shoulder when a cheery word and a hand on the shoulder was worth a king's ransom. He was the best pal I ever had, and I had many as I wandered over the face of this old earth.

And, friend, if you meet up with me take your chances upon insulting me but do not mouth a word about my pal, Eugene Rodin. I'm awful finicky about this pal of mine for he's all that a good pal should be and that's saying all there is to say.

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THE MISFIT LEARNS THE VINEGAR BUSINESS

by William H Hamby

Author of "The Harp on a Barbed Wire Fence," "The Adventures of a Misfit."

ONE SUNNY afternoon in mid-Winter, a young man limped into Benton Springs, Kansas. He was several days the worse for wear, but did not appear disreputable; and there was something humorous about his limp, as if he considered every step a sort of joke on his blistered right heel. He looked at the store-fronts with interested alertness.

It was Simplex Cox. He turned in at Brad Johnson's drug-store. Drug-stores were not a habit with Simplex. He merely went in because it was the most prosperous looking establishment on the street, and had the largest glass front.

He was not seeking either medicine or stimulants, but a job. Since he resigned as a school-teacher in the Ozarks by leaving the president of the school-board gagged and tied on the stage at a country exhibition, he had not struck even the trail of a new occupation.

It was not a busy afternoon and Brad Johnson was taking an unlimited amount of time to sell a girl with yellow hair and light complexion a package of Yucatan chewing-gum.

Brad's forehead had checked itself in an incipient retarding slope in time to save him from being either a genius or an idiot; but it did not save him from many other human frailties. His chin was nothing to brag about, but to compensate for these weaknesses he had a very bold black mustache, a nicely roachable head of black hair that he combed down in a promontory on his slanting forehead, and eyes reminiscent of a I A. M. poker-game.

The girl with her arms on the show-case, turned her white and pink and yellow head and looked at the newcomer. A girl that has been properly brought up has no use for a man who does not wear good clothes and carry about the visible evidence of a good income. But there are girls—some of them with yellow hair and light complexion—who care more for a man's face than for his tailor.

Simplex had a good face. He always seemed to be regretting his mistakes but laughing inside about them. His hair was thick and had a tendency to curl at the ends; his mouth shut well and looked quiet; but his brown eyes were talkative.

The girl smiled and Simplex smiled back. She threw one fleeting dare-devil, defiant glance out of the corner of her eyes at Brad, and then, holding out the package of Yucatan to the stranger—

"Have some gum?"

"Thanks." Simplex took one of the packages. "It is nourishing."

The girl went out of the store laughing and the glance she threw over her shoulder at the door implied that Benton Springs

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was going to be interesting the rest of the Winter.

"Well?" Brad shoved six bottles of liver regulator to one side on the shelf, and began to stack in some bottles of Spring tonic that had been recently unboxed under the counter.

"What can I do for you?" He was not looking at Simplex, and his voice had that nasty, scrapy tone of the man who is always ready to fight to prove he is bolder than he feels.

"Well," repeated Simplex after waiting a moment for him to look around, "I'm a pilgrim in a strange land—seeking a lodge in a cucumber patch."

"Huh!" Brad turned around with a bottle of tonic in his hand and looked red-eyed at the newcomer. "Not a nut are you?"

Simplex smiled and said simply—

"Do you know where a fellow might get a job—any sort of job?"

Brad pulled each side of his mustache once, and the left side twice, and looked out of the glass front. There had been a little snow and it was nearly gone. He was wondering if, by this afternoon, he might get out his four-cylinder Huffex and take the blonde girl for a ride.

"Know anything about the drug business?"

"Nary a thing. I don't know Hoffstetter's Bitters from Peruna. But I could learn."

Brad eyed him closely, suspiciously, a moment.

"Lots of fellows could. I ain't runnin' no day nursery."

"Not even a night school?" Simplex smiled.

"Better try the grocery store across the street," Brad spoke morosely. "Fellow don't have to know anything to work in a grocery store."

SIMPLEX went across the street and entered B. T. Baker's grocery store.

And so simple a thing as crossing a street may change a man's destiny. He got a job, and went to work next morning as a grocery clerk at five dollars a week—with the eternal promise of a raise when his work justified it.

Simplex's work justified it in two weeks. He did not look at all like a grocery clerk, and really was not one. But his eyes had a way of short-cutting to the thing that needed attention. Most men must stumble over a thing and bump into all its sharp corners and rough sides before they can see it.

Simplex saw a dozen things to stop waste and draw trade that Baker had never thought of, and in a month he was waiting on two-thirds of the customers; and more than half the phone calls asked for him.

Still the raise, like Spring, was slow in coming.

The last day of April Baker was out, and it was an idle hour in the store. The girl with yellow hair and fair skin was taking even a longer time to buy a package of raisins of Simplex than she had a package of chewing-gum of Brad Johnson.

When she took the package of raisins she accidentally included part of his hand —and her fingers were tingly.

"I thought when you came," she looked a teasing pout, "that we were going to be good friends."

"Aren't we, Miss Ray?"

"Well—I don't know. You've never— Do you know you haven't ever taken me to a picture show this whole Winter?"

Simplex looked distressed. It pained him to have neglected and disappointed an attractive girl. Then he broke into his engaging smile.

"And do you know my wages are exactly five dollars a week? And my board exactly four-seventy-five?"

"That's a shame," she said with real indignation. "You are worth four times that."

He nodded acquiescence.

"I am," soberly, "and I'm going to get it. But—" he pushed his fingers up through his thick hair—"I don't know yet how I'm going to do it."

"Say," the girl put her hand on top of his which rested on the counter—did it absent-mindedly, "a party of us are going on a moonlight picnic tonight; straw ride to Oats Creek—have our supper. Won't you go?"

"If I can ride with you, I'd love to," he said.

"You can," she smiled most sweetly. "And I'll fix supper for two."

He went with her to the door and stood talking and laughing a few moments in the warm Spring sun.

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BRAD JOHNSON, polishing up his soda fountain, looked out of the glass front. His eyes had been traveling across to the grocery store very often the last few moments.

"Shack!" he bellowed, as nearly as he could.

The roustabout came from the back of the drug-store. Meshack was a big black negro with a streak of bad Indian in him. A gash under his left jaw and a ridge on his right cheek and a dent in his forehead at the edge of the wool bore testimony to the ineffectiveness as deadly weapons of razor, baseball bat, and brick, respectively.

Brad gave his head a vicious little jerk toward the couple across the street.

"If something happened to that guy that got him out of town and made him sick at his stomach every time he remembered this section of the moral vineyard—it would be worth ten dollars."

"Huh," said the big negro in disgust. "I reckon it'd be worth twenty dollars."

Brad tested the soda-fountain by drawing a glass from the right-hand spigot. He drank it, and sucked his lips a minute.

"It might be worth twenty," he said casually, "if it happened right away."

"When some'n is going to happen," Meshack grinned like a bad dog at a piece of raw meat, "it most generally happens afore daylight."

II

AN HOUR after the girl had gone, Baker came back to the store. It was the first real warm day, and he had come by the drug-store to sample Brad's soda-fountain. Simplex was sorting potatoes.

"Cox—" Baker looked around the empty but orderly store regretfully—"business is a little slack here in the Spring. I've been wondering if I couldn't get along without you."

"I have been wondering that too." Simplex tossed a potato into the seed-box without looking up.

"You have?" surprised.

"Yes," said Simplex, grabbing up a handful of knotty potatoes from the barrel. "I'm planning to start a store of my own."

Baker cleared his throat and shifted his feet.

"You see," continued the young man, "I've become acquainted with a lot of people here who would like to trade with me, and I've got some fine ideas up my sleeve on how to run a store."

"How about the money? Got any of that up your sleeve?" Baker was pleased with his repartee.

"None saved from my wages," said Simplex. "But—" he rose and dusted his hands —"if a fellow has brains there is no trouble to get money."

Baker thought this over until closing time.

"I guess," he said rather sheepishly, "I will raise you to ten a week."

Simplex shook his head.

"If you offered me fifteen—I'd think it over."

"Well," Baker said desperately, "don't do anything until we've considered it again."

So Simplex went on the picnic in great spirits. He had a fine time. Etta Ray was constantly worrying lest she fall off the hay. But Simplex was careful that she did not. Miss Ray was not a forward girl, merely efficient. And although Simplex had never been acquainted with efficiency before, he liked it.

It was eleven o'clock when the picnickers returned. Benton Springs was asleep, and dark, save here and there a winking light, one at the drug-store, and one at the depot, and another at Dr. Coyle's. Benton Springs did not have electric lights.

Simplex helped Etta Ray from the wagon, and went in with her. Her hand nestled snugly under his arm, and they tarried a few moments on the darkened porch.

As Simplex went down the street he carried his hat in his hand. The south wind from over the Oklahoma prairies felt good upon his flushed face and bared head. He was in a glow with thoughts of Etta Ray and walked in a daze of happy unconsciousness.

The street sloped down to the wooden bridge over the little creek that ran from the springs, then turned into a road that ran through a swampy timbered strip of vacant land to scattering houses on the rise beyond. Simplex boarded in one of those houses.

From the porch where she had stood still watching the young man of the curly hair and the warm smile disappear down the street, Etta Ray saw something black slip

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out from behind the blacksmith shop and creep after the unsuspecting youth.

Instinctively she knew the whole thing. It was Brad's negro, and it meant assassination. He was too far for a shout to reach him—and it might only hasten the tragedy.

She ran into the house and began frantically ringing for Central. Central at this hour of night was always asleep.

SIMPLEX looked over the trees in the draw below him at the darkened houses, and then beyond to the stars. He stopped a minute and ran his fingers through his thick moist hair. It was a nice clean, sweet world and things were coming his way after all.

He thought he heard a sound and looked back—but there was nothing. He started on, whistling "Oh, the girl, the pretty little girl, the girl I left behind me."

The wind gave an April puff and sent some loose papers skittering across the road. The town was very still and dark. A little speck of town—with lights out, squatting here on the prairie—and out there miles and miles of night. He felt a little shivery, paused again, and looked back. There was nothing save a dark barrel or something against Bill Williams' shack.

He walked a little faster as he neared the wooden bridge across the stream; there were willows and cottonwoods close beside the road after the bridge—a hundred yards of darkness.

There was still a light at Doctor Coyle's, the last house before the bridge, and some one was looking out of the window.

As he approached, the hall door swung open and a girl standing half back in the shadow of the room, motioned violently to him to come in.

Thinking some one was in distress he obeyed the summons.

As Simplex stepped into the hall, Erma Coyle quickly closed the door and bolted it.

"Some one is following you," she said frightenedly. "Etta Ray just telephoned for us to stop you. She thinks it is Brad Johnson's negro. I'm sure it is. I saw him behind you, and he has a piece of iron in his hand."

Simplex jumped, and then laughed. The doctor's cat had rubbed purringly against his leg.

They entered the sitting-room and stood by a window where there was no light and looked out. The big burly negro was there crouching beside the walk not thirty yards away, waiting.

"You must not go out tonight," Miss Coyle said positively.

"Oh, yes," Simplex said easily. "It was fine of you to warn me. But now that I know, I'm not afraid."

III

"MAY I borrow this, Miss Coyle." Simplex stooped and took up the friendly cat that was still purring against his leg.

He stroked the black fur and tucked the contented cat under his coat. At the gate he turned and called in a distinct tone to the still frightened girl—

"I'll be around and see your father in the morning."

He went down the road, whistling, and crossed the bridge with never a backward glance.

Yet he knew the big negro was following him. When he entered the strip of dark woods across the boggy little bottom, Meshack would rapidly close the distance between them.

Still whistling, Simplex walked slowly for a moment after he crossed the bridge and listened intently. He heard the soft-padded step of the slipping negro on the bridge. He was not fifty yards behind.

At the turn of the road, where he would be hid a moment from his pursuer, Simplex ran lightly for fifty yards.

Right in the middle of the road he squatted and rolled himself into a ball. He pulled the tail of his coat up over his head so it hid his face and made him look like a mere black splotch on the road.

The big negro was coming with swift, cautious steps, almost running. In his hand was the bar of iron. He halted a minute and peered down the road for his victim. It was a dim road, only a little starlight got through the trees, but it was open. No one walking upon it.

Meshack slowed up suspiciously. He was a brave negro, but it is easier to slip on to something you see than something you don't.

He came on cautiously a few steps.

The restless April wind ran through the cottonwoods with a weird *woof*. The whole

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town, the whole world, was still save for a far-off howl of a lonesome dog.

Meshack started forward more briskly, and then saw the dark splotch on the road —a black, formless something directly in his path.

He slowed up again, came ten steps further and stopped. He was within twenty yards. He gripped his iron bar and lifted it defensively.

Simplex never moved, but his fingers pinched hard on the tail of the black cat under his arm. It gave a surprised, scared "M—e—e—ow!"

The big negro jumped and backed two steps.

"Who's dar?" he demanded threateningly.

Once more the cat's shrill distress cut through the cottonwoods, and Simplex released him with a hissing, sepulchral—

"S-S-S-get 'em!"

The black cat shot down the road for home—and home was directly past Meshack.

There was a clatter of iron falling on the gravel and with one weird wail that carried two miles over the prairie, Meshack broke for the bridge.

As the wooden boards rattled as if a runaway team were crossing, Simplex got up, shaking with laughter.

"I guess," he said soberly, as he let himself into his room, "the nigger is cured—but Meester Johnson has something coming."

NEXT morning Simplex as usual had opened the store and started the day's business before Baker came down. And Baker, in passing, had dropped into the drug-store to chat with Brad Johnson a minute.

"Brad's worried about his nigger," Baker remarked as he took off his coat and put on his apron. "Meshack hasn't showed up this morning, and Brad is afraid somebody's killed him."

"A black conscience is as uneasy as a cat," remarked Simplex as he weighed a dollar's worth of sugar. "What did you decide about that fifteen dollars a week?"

"I reckon I can't pay it," Baker shook his head.

Simplex's hopes dropped heavily. He had fully expected his bluff to work. So sure had he been that he had boasted to the girl about his raise.

"But instead of you going in business for yourself," suggested Baker, "I've been thinking we might go into partnership in some sort of wholesale business."

"I would like that," said Simplex quickly. "I have always wanted to get into some sort of business that might turn out big."

Baker sat down on the edge of the counter and nibbled at a sliver of cinnamon-bark.

"I've been thinking for some time if I could get the right sort of partner I would start a wholesale vinegar business.

"You see, just across the line here south of us in Oklahoma are a half-dozen little towns—country stores—that just spring up with the new zinc mines and oil wells. Money free; and the farmers around there are going to raise a lot of cucumbers this Spring, and they'll need vinegar for pickling.

"Now, I have a brother over in Missouri at Back Slide Knob that has a big apple orchard and makes the finest apple vinegar in the country. He has vinegar five years old. He can't get but 30 cents a gallon for it down there; but we could sell it for 75 cents out here when once they know how good it is. No such vinegar anywhere.

"This is my idea. We open up a vinegar house—in your name. You can use the old brick building back of the store here to keep the barrels in. I've got two pretty fair horses eating their heads off that you can use for their feed. And I know where you can get a wagon for little or nothing.

"You start out with about five barrels of vinegar and go from place to place until you have sold it all, then come back for another load.

"We'll sell it for 75 cents a gallon, send my brother 35 cents, you take 25 cents for selling—and after the freight is paid it will leave me about 10 cents a gallon for my share. How does that strike you?"

"Fine," said Simplex. "If it will sell—and I'm willing to try anything."

"I know where you can sell two or three barrels at the start," said Baker. "Benson at Lone Mound knows about it, and has been wanting me to order him some. And Tiller at Cochita will try a barrel, and, I think, Williams at Mulberry.

"You won't have no trouble selling it—and at $15 profit a barrel you ought to make a lot of money."

"How soon can we start?"

Simplex was afire with the scheme. A

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possibility of $60 to $90 a week was thrilling, and besides he would be out in the open these Spring days. He loved that.

Baker thought a minute.

"I have three barrels on hand that you might start out with to-morrow. The name of it is 'The Back Slide Knob Apple Vinegar.' That is our trade-mark. Remember that, and impress it on them so they won't forget it."

That afternoon, as Simplex was getting his wagon and harness in shape for an early start next morning in the vinegar business, Arthur Wells, the prosecuting attorney of the county, came around to see him.

"I understand," he remarked, "that you had some difficulty with Brad Johnson's negro last night."

"No." Simplex shook his head and grinned. "He had some trouble with me."

"Do you know that Johnson had anything to do with it? Have you any evidence he had hired him to attack you?" asked the young attorney.

Simplex shook his head.

"He did, but I have no evidence. Where a case is perfectly plain, there hardly ever is any evidence is there?"

The attorney laughed.

"I guess you are right. I've thought for two years I had a perfectly plain case against Brad, but never have been able to prove it. I've watched that darned cuss and his drug-store like a bunch of crows watching a hawk; and while some stuff certainly comes out of there, I've never seen any go in; and on the two raids I've made, nothing was ever found. I was in hopes you had something on him. I'd rather catch him than a white weasel."

"I wish I had," said Simplex feelingly, "for I'd rather see him caught than a whole tribe of weasels."

At daylight next morning Simplex drove off south toward the Oklahoma line with three sixty-gallon barrels of vinegar in the back of the wagon.

Three miles south of town a man rose up from behind a big bunch of dead grass at the side of the road and ordered—

"Stop!"

IV

SIMPLEX stopped his wagon. The fellow without any leave or explanation climbed up on the spring seat beside him. His matted hair looked as if he traveled without a comb, and slept out a good deal.

"How much you goin' to gimme?" The uninvited passenger looked around suggestively.

"Give you—for what?" Simplex was surprised.

"For not tellin'." The fellow was plainly disgusted at Cox's stupidity.

"Not telling what?" Simplex was mystified.

"Aw, shucks!" The fellow twisted the corner of his mouth. "What's the matter with you. Do I look like a sheepherder?"

"No," said Simplex, "you look like a sheep-killing dog." He stopped the wagon. "I don't like your company. Hop out."

The fellow looked at him long and significantly and saw he meant it.

"——!" he said, climbing over the wheel. "If you ain't got nerve. But you'll pay all right—all right."

Simplex puzzled more or less over this for some time. But at nine o'clock he crossed the Oklahoma line. The day was fine and the prairie, green with young grass and dotted with flowers, made his spirits rise on a great rebound.

He got to Lone Mound about two o'clock. There was a general store, a drug-store, and a half-dozen shops and shacks. The owner of the general store readily bought a barrel of Back Slide Knob Apple Vinegar. He had used it before and knew how good it was.

At starting, Baker had given Simplex three bills to the three men to whom he was going, explaining that each owed him for a previous barrel and asked him to collect. The bills read

"2 barrels B. S. K. Vinegar—$90.00"

All three dealers took a new barrel and paid the $90 without any uproar at all.

The afternoon of the third day, Simplex was back at Benton Springs with $270. $45 of that was his. Forty-five dollars for three days' work! Never had he dreamed of making money like that before. He liked the wholesale business.

He went to see Etta Ray that evening, and could not forbear telling her about his great good fortune.

"I'm going to get rich in the vinegar business!" he declared enthusiastically, as they sat on the porch.

"Vinegar business!" The girl with yellow

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hair looked off into the dusk. It sounded like a sneer. "I thought maybe *you* were a man." It was a sneer.

"Why—it does not matter what a man's business is, so long as it is honest." That was the first platitude he could think of.

"Well," said the girl coldly, "don't be so honest they catch you at it."

Simplex was troubled over that when he left. Things had not gone well that evening. Half angry and wholly disappointed, he went around through town to see if Baker was still in the grocery store. He wanted to get an early start again next day.

There was a light in the grocery, although all the other stores were closed. Simplex still carried a key. He let himself in and went back toward the desk where Baker often worked over the books at night.

At the sound of the opening of the door, two men came from the obscurity in the back of the store.

It was Baker and Brad Johnson, and they were discussing seed potatoes.

NEXT morning, Baker gave Simplex the names of six other possible customers, all in small Oklahoma towns or cross-road stores.

"I've written these about our vinegar," he explained. "If they buy, collect for two barrels. We are in the wholesale business you know, and make it a rule to never sell less than two barrels at a time. But they can take one now and have the other delivered later."

At Wolf Rock, the store-keeper took a barrel without hesitancy, and counted out $90.

"Paying for two barrels," remarked Simplex, pleased to make advance collections.

"No, for one," the storekeeper said crossly.

"Then it is only forty-five dollars," reminded Cox.

The storekeeper looked up at Simplex an instant.

"Oh, ——!" he said, as if seeing light. "I thought you were on. Yes, I'll pay for two," and pushed the currency across the counter.

By the afternoon of the fourth day, Simplex had sold four barrels and collected from each $90. He had rambled with his wagon over a big strip of northern Oklahoma, and it was pretty wild country to be carrying around $360.

Late in the afternoon, as he drove toward Sequoia, ten miles further west, he came into broken country. The prairie rose up in swells, and ahead seemed to break into real hills with rocks and trees.

It was not very thickly settled, and toward night became wilder. Simplex's mind dwelt continuously on that $360. He had heard many wild tales of Oklahoma bandits, and the money worried him.

At sundown, as he topped a swell of the prairie, he looked back and saw two men galloping along the same road, with guns across their saddles.

He turned quickly to the left and whipped his tired team into a trot. In the hills he took a right-hand road that would not show fresh tracks and rattled off up a valley.

He looked back often but saw no more of his pursuers and concluded they were merely ranchers passing the same way.

He stopped at an open spot between the hills near a spring, picketed his horses out on the grass, and built a fire to boil his coffee.

He had eaten his supper and sat by the stick fire which had almost burned out, before turning in.

It was a cool, crisp night and a star glittered brightly over the top of the hill to the west. It was a lonesome place, no house within miles. A coyote howled dismally.

He saw a man outlined against the sky on top of the hill, then another. They disappeared almost instantly.

The two men were stalking him.

V

SIMPLEX sat still for a moment as if he had not seen. He could not run away. His outfit was worth more than the money. And running would only increase his chances of getting shot.

He casually moved back out of the light of the fire, got out his gun, held it across his knees, and waited.

The accidental rattle of a rolling stone, the crash of a broken twig, alone told of the bandits' approach. They were now at the foot of the hill a hundred yards away.

He saw them for a moment as they came into the open but quickly they disappeared behind a clump of bushes.

Simplex's heart was going like the drumming of a partridge. The night with its

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awful stillness seemed weird and unnatural. He propped his gun up on his knees and kept watch for them to reappear.

Would it pay him to risk his life for $360? he asked himself. And only sixty of that his? He hated to lose the money. "Dog-gone it," he said vexedly, "just when I was getting a good start in the vinegar business, to be robbed and lose my job."

If he lost Baker's money it would end things. His first panic passed, and he felt depressed, discouraged. Why did something always have to happen when he was getting a start?

The two bandits had half risen and were slipping toward him, the barrels of their guns projecting ahead of them.

No! He would not engage in a shooting match with dead shots for $360. He put his gun in his pocket and stood up in the firelight.

"Hello!" he called, when they were within fifty yards.

The men jumped and crouched and brought their rifles to their shoulders.

"Wait," called Simplex. His scare had passed now. "Don't shoot in haste. Come on into camp."

The bandits came, cautiously, their fingers on the triggers, and stopped at the edge of the firelight.

They were not masked. One of them had matted hair and looked as if he slept out. Cox recognized him as the fellow of the roadside. The other one had a grizzly gray beard.

"Glad to see you are reasonable," said the bearded one. "We'll just take over what you got." Simplex had started to put his hand in his pocket for his money, when the fellow added: "But we'll have a drink of it first. I'm as thirsty as a rattlesnake that hasn't bitten anybody for a month."

The two moved toward the wagon. Simplex caught the meaning and felt a quick rebound of spirits. They were not bandits but highjackers. A highjacker is a man who holds up a bootlegger, not for his money but for his whisky. They thought Cox was peddling whisky.

Simplex grinned.

"Help yourself."

The bearded man turned a pocket-light on the barrels. The one with matted hair yanked the plug out of a bunghole.

"Here's a cup." Simplex offered them a quart tin, grinning from jaw to jaw.

They tipped the barrel and filled the cup. The bearded one started to put it to his mouth, but the other caught his hand greedily:

"Ahead of you. I saw him first."

The bearded man pushed him back, and took a big swig. He spurted the liquid clear over the back of the wagon and spit violently.

"Oh ——! Vinegar!"

The other tasted and also swore:

"This barrel is a blind. It is the other." But that proved vinegar, too.

Simplex's grin had not been without justification. He had started in very innocently; but the tramp's remarks, the $90 a barrel payment, and Etta Ray's sneer had all aroused suspicion. So before he started on this trip he had thoroughly tested all six barrels and found they really were vinegar.

"End 'em over," said the bearded man suspiciously. "May be a false bottom."

"Oh, I thought so," he gloated. "Here's the other bunghole." But when it was unplugged, it was just the same vinegar.

"Oh, ——!" he said again in deep disgust; he was very, very thirsty and had thought here was a good drunk ahead of him.

"Try the middle," said the tramp. And out came a strong pocket-knife, and they dug a hole in the middle of one stave.

That, too, was vinegar. They took up their guns too disappointed and mad even to swear.

Simplex was standing by the fire again. He had put on some fresh sticks which blazed up and lighted his curly head and frank smiling face.

"You see," he said, pleasantly, "I am really selling vinegar—only."

The one with matted hair clubbed his gun and made a step toward him.

"If I knowed you was lyin', I'd bust your skull," he said vindictively.

"Oh, come on," ordered the bearded man. "Don't you see the goop is really honest."

"I've a good notion," growled the other, "to bust him for bein' honest."

EARLY next morning, Simplex was on the road, back in the open country again, his spirits keeping tune to the dance of the Spring morning over the prairie. He had come through a bad night, his money safe in his pocket. He hoped to make the two remaining towns

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before evening and then head back for Benton Springs.

About an hour by sun he heard horses' feet on the road behind, and looking back saw two men galloping after him.

"More highjackers," he grinned. "Well, let them come."

"Halt," called the leader as he galloped up with a gun in his right hand.

"I've halted," said Simplex, good-humoredly. "Come on and help yourself."

"You are under arrest," said the spokesman. They were not highjackers, but deputy United States marshals.

VI

SO SURE that they had captured a bootlegger red handed—or rather red barreled, the marshals scarcely deemed it worth while investigating. But on Simplex's open-faced protestation of innocence, they examined his barrels more carefully than had the highjackers. They were equipped for it and bored gimlet-holes in four places, but gave up at last even more nonplused than the highjackers.

At five o'clock, Simplex sold his last barrel of vinegar and with $540 in his pocket, headed his team north across the prairie. It was sixty miles to Benton Springs but he planned to get in the next afternoon.

It was nearly ten o'clock the next night, however, when Simplex unharnessed and fed his team.

He was tired, but went to the old brick building where they kept their vinegar supply, to see if Baker had got in another shipment as he promised. There was to be an old settlers' reunion in Benton Springs the next day, and Simplex wanted to get an early start before the roads were full of vehicles and machines coming to town.

Ninety dollars he had made this trip, and it had taken only four days. That made $135, the last seven days—more money than he had ever made in three months before. Surely it could not be true! But it was, for he had the money. Well, he'd not let any grass grow in his wagon-tracks while the demand for vinegar lasted.

There were no barrels in the old brick house. What was the matter? Then he remembered he had the only key to the place. Maybe Baker had had them unloaded at the grocery.

Simplex let himself into the store with the key he still carried for he helped the grocer whenever he was in.

Yes, the vinegar was here. Six new barrels, besides the three Baker already had in stock. These were close in the corner of the wareroom. It occurred to Simplex that three barrels always sat close in that corner; and that the one barrel on its side, from which they drew vinegar for customers, was the same barrel that had been there for three months. There was not much demand for vinegar.

He moved the barrels. They were very heavy, up to the last one—the one close in the corner. It tilted lightly but seemed fastened to the floor. Simplex made more room and turned it on its side.

It pulled up something from the floor. He got a light. It was a piece of hose, one end fastened to the bottom of the barrel the other under the floor.

Cox made a quick and complete examination.

Then he sat down on the head of a barrel with damp, sticky sweat oozing from his face.

"I came," he said solemnly, "within exactly six inches of the Federal Penitentiary. And I believe it is two years for bootleggers!"

And then at the thought of the men who had used him as a dummy—who had risked wrecking his life for eight dollars a gallon for whisky—his mountain blood boiled to the danger point.

He took his gun from his pocket, saw it was fully loaded, left the store, and started for Brad Johnson's boarding-place.

But a sense of humor stopped him. A half hour later he returned to the store with a gallon can and some bottles of different colored stuff. He detached the hose from the bottom of the barrel, worked a short time, then put the barrels back exactly as he found them.

AT MIDNIGHT, the prosecuting attorney was called out of bed by a messenger with a sealed note. Next morning, Etta Ray also got one.

Acting on the tip, the attorney was downtown early. It was a warm Spring morning and the people began to arrive by eight o'clock for the day's celebration.

Directly, the men began to drop into Brad Johnson's drug-store for a soda-water.

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It was right warm, but scarcely justified such an early rush.

A big red-faced countryman came out of the door with thunder in his face and spitting like lightning.

Directly two men came out, looking foolish but mad, making wry faces.

The prosecuting attorney sauntered a little nearer the door and glanced in. A fourth customer received a glass filled from the right-hand spigot, gave a big thirsty gulp and then flung the glass crashing upon the counter. This brought Brad himself onto the scene. A cotton-headed assistant had so far been managing the fountain.

Brad arrived just in time to serve a big bull-necked cattleman.

With one gulp, the cattleman set the glass down, spit in Brad's face, and swore a man-sized oath.

"You ape," he choked out, "do you think you can play horse with me? You may think it's a joke to serve castor oil and gasoline and —— only knows what. But here is what I think of it."

He lifted himself half across the counter and struck Brad a jolt that sent him crashing into a shelf of Peruna.

Brad, after stanching the blood for a few minutes, tested the right-hand spigot himself.

With a half-choked howl, he dashed in rage out of the store, across the street, and into Baker's grocery store.

It was then the attorney and his four officers took charge of him and Baker, and marched back to the grocer's wareroom.

They broke in the head of one of the barrels, and, running his arm down into the cheap vinegar, the attorney found securely marooned in the heart of the barrel, a small keg. This keg, totally surrounded by vinegar, was broken away from its fastenings and brought up.

It contained ten gallons of corn whisky and, at the bottom of the keg, was a brass bung over which could be screwed a piece of hose. The hose ran through the floor into a lead pipe that carried across the street to Brad Johnson's soda-fountain. Laying the pipe had been easy, two years before, when the street was dug criss-cross with ditches for water-pipes. This was the discovery Simplex had made the night before, and he had filled the keg just then on duty with a mixture that would sicken a mule.

The girl with yellow hair got her note in time to get down-town as the officers were coming up the street with Baker and Brad Johnson. She took in the situation at a glance.

"Oh, Mr. Johnson," she stopped the official party a moment, "here is a note that may comfort you."

The sheriff read it first, and then handed it to Brad:

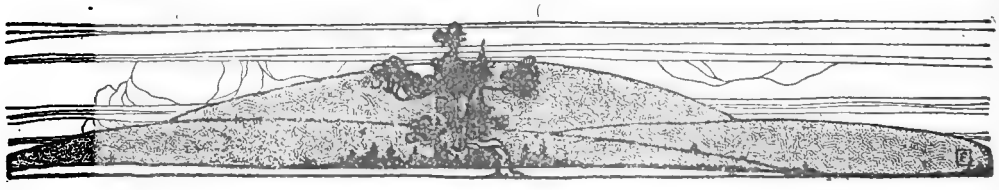
DEAR MISS RAY:

I know now why you sneered at the vinegar business, and I think a lot of you for that sneer. I hate to confess I was born a fool and educated along the same line; but really I never knew until tonight that I was selling whisky for Baker and Johnson.

If either of these interested friends inquire where I have gone, tell them I have gone into the hardware business, and if they need any war supplies after they get out of jail to be sure to look me up.

Sincerely,

SIMPLEX, THE SIMPLE.



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I FIRST laid eyes on the lean, clean figure of young Anscombe, idler, big-game hunter, on that Spring morning in Pretoria, 1877, when Great Britain took formal possession of the Transvaal. A year later we met again, this time because of Anscombe's determination to hunt buffalo in the Lydenburg country back of Delagoa Bay.

I tried to dissuade him, for I knew the Basutos up-country were unfriendly; but the outcome was that I went as his guide.

From the flaming morn when we trekked out across the veld, till we entered the bush, far north, all went well. Then suddenly we came upon something which even gave me a start, and I have been in as many tight corners, and seen as many weird spectacles in the heart of Africa, I presume, as any man alive.

What startled me was a temple—a home there in the wilderness, built of snowy marble. But if the home seemed strange, a thousand times more mysterious were its two inhabitants, Marnham, an old man, and Dr. Todd, whose shifty eyes made me distrust him immediately.

It was at once plain they were anxious to be rid of us. Was it because of a mysterious Miss Heda Marnham who was expected at any time? Dr. Todd, it was plain, was not anxious to have her meet young Anscombe. Or did these forest-dwellers fear we might discover the reason for their living thus?

At any rate, we soon shook the dust of their yard from our feet, and began our hunting. But almost at the sound of our first shot we were ambushed by natives; and from a wounded black I learned that they had been informed of our coming by a white man.

All thought of fighting it out with the Basutos fled when Anscombe caught a bullet in his foot. We must win back to the Temple. We did. And Dr. Todd pronounced Anscombe's wound too serious to allow traveling for some days.

Then a strange thing happened which gave me a clue to the "trading" that Dr. Todd vaguely said was his and Marnham's reason for dwelling in the bush.

The Basutos had followed almost to the Temple. But instead of attacking they broke into song and spent the night in revelry. I knew they had somehow got hold of their greatest enemy—liquor. From this my thoughts snapped instantly to their weapons. Where did they get them? And what, besides their friendship, did they give in return?

I stumbled on the answer to the first question next morning—a box, hidden away in the bush back of the Temple, filled with rifles, powder, and spirits.

The second question, that of the payment given by the natives, Marnham cleared up the evening he and Dr. Todd taunted Anscombe and me into a card game as partners; and that same night I learned why two shrewd, brilliant men had ducked back to cover under the shadow of Zululand.

The traders lost, for Marnham poured

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down drink after drink once he found we were not to be easily beaten. Anscombe totaled up their debt—£749.

His face flaming with rage, Marnham staggered up.

"There's your pay!" he shouted, and he threw a handful of uncut diamonds upon the table. He was an illicit diamond buyer.

He shook his fist at Todd.

"It's your fault, you—you medical jail-bird!" he cried.

"Don't you dare call me that—you murderer!" gasped the doctor.

Marnham seized a decanter and hurled it full at Todd's head, missing by an eyelash. Then we intervened.

After we had induced the pair to retire, Anscombe examined the cards.

"Marked, by Jove!" he exclaimed.

"Shut up, you fool," I retorted. "I'd give a hundred pounds to be clear of this place. There'll be murder done yet over this business, and I only hope it won't be us."

And again I listened for night-sounds from the near-by natives, who I knew would cut the throats of any whites in Lydenburg at a word from the owners of the Temple.

Next morning, however, the quarrel was temporarily patched up, for Miss Heda, young, slender, fascinating, arrived. The girl and Anscombe became fast friends at once, while over the face of Dr. Todd when he saw them together came the look of a wild beast about to be robbed of its prey.

A few days after her arrival Heda came to me with the secret that I had guessed. She was engaged to a man she hated—Dr. Todd. Yet she must keep her promise, for the doctor had some powerful hold over her father, who, she feared, had once done something dreadful. And when she had finished I knew more than she thought, I knew she was in love with Anscombe.

I asked time to think, and, when the girl left, I fell asleep. I dreamed I was once more in the Black Kloof in Zululand. In front of me squatted the old witch-doctor Zikali, the "Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born," whom I had not seen in years.

"So you are here again, Macumazahn," he said. "What do you seek from the opener of roads? Not Mameena. No, it is she who seeks you—she who has a hungry heart that does not forget."

"How can I meet a woman who is dead?" I demanded.

"Seek the answer in the hour of battle when the white men, your brothers, fall. Harken. When the storm bursts, bring hither the maiden Heddana, and the white lord, Mauriti. I shall be glad to see you, Macumazahn, for at last I am about to smite the House of Senzangacona and bring ruin and death upon the King of the Zulu Nation."

I awoke. And I knew my dream had pointed a way out of our terrible situation. We could flee to Zululand.

The climax came suddenly. Todd and Marnham quarreled bitterly one night. The next morning Marnham was found dead in his chair. Todd stood dazed before the corpse. With Marnham's death he had lost his hold over Heda. I knew he was desperate.

I turned the leaf of a blotting-book by Marnham's elbow, and on a sheet were written words in his hand:

Greater love hath no man than this——

Then I remembered a letter he had given me some time before with the request that I deposit it in a Pretoria bank against his death. It ran:

DEAR MR. QUATERMAIN:

I have remembered that those who quarrel with Dr. Todd are apt to die soon and suddenly. If I do not live, you will see that everything I own goes to my daughter, Heda.

It is my earnest hope that Heda may get clear of that scoundrel Todd and marry Mr. Anscombe.

Sincerely yours,

H. A. MARNHAM.

Miss Heda bore up bravely, for she, like ourselves, feared Dr. Todd would play his last card. We were right.

From one of Todd's native patients I learned the Temple was to be attacked that night by Sekukuni and that it was the white medicine-man, Todd, who had told Sekukuni's people to kill us. In the meantime Todd disappeared.

Knowing two of us could not defend the Temple against the Basutos, Heda, Anscombe and Footsack, my native boy, packed the cape-cart while I inspanned the horses. And so, since the hostile Basutos stood between us and the Transvaal, we drove off through the Yellow Wood Swamp toward Zululand and the old witch-doctor, Zikali.

I was riding ahead. The gloom of the swamp deepened, casting long, fantastic shadows across the path. Suddenly there

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came to my straining ears the sound of men's voices, raised in anger. I heard:

"Let go, or by Heaven——"

Then a furious laugh and other words:

"In five minutes the Kaffirs will be here. In ten you will be dead!"

I wheeled my horse and spurred toward the cart. As I rode round the last intervening patch of trees there came a shot.

I beheld the horses rearing and snorting. Holding their heads was Todd, who rocked on his feet. His face was distorted with pain and rage. He pitched forward into the mud, and as I glanced up I beheld Anscombe sitting on the wagon-seat, a smoking revolver in his hands.

There was no time for words. "Flog the horses and follow me!" I shouted, and off we went at a hard gallop along the native track. Far behind we could see flames of the burning Temple; the Basutos were at our heels.

As rapidly as I could, I told them of Zululand, of the dangers we must face, of Zikali whom I believed we could trust, of Cetewayo, the King, whom I had often befriended. Death lay behind us, therefore we must press on. The natives followed closely. We came to a swollen river which our horses swam. And so we escaped the Basutos and came into the land of the Swazi.

From the Swazi I learned that a war-cloud hung over Zululand. Cetewayo was likely, at any time, to fly at the throats of the English. The Swazi had been asked to aid the Zulus in this event, but had refused.

One morning there came to me a messenger from Zululand, a witch-doctoress named Nombé. She was tall and graceful, with great deep eyes and mysterious smile.

"I come from Zikali," she said. "Zikali now awaits you at the Black Kloof. It is your only hope of safety. For Zikali is about to wreak vengeance on Cetewayo and Cetewayo's house for all the wrongs it has done him.

"Come. Inspan your horses, Macumazahn, for I have done my business and am ready to start."

CHAPTER XI

ZIKALI

TEN days had gone by when once more I found myself drawing near to the mouth of the Black Kloof where dwelt Zikali the Wizard. Our journey in Zululand had been tedious and uneventful. It seemed to me that we met extraordinarily few people; it was as if the place had suddenly become depopulated, and I even passed great kraals where there was no one to be seen.

I asked Nombé what was the meaning of this, for she and three silent men she had with her were acting as our guides. Once she answered that the people had moved because of lack of food, as the season had been one of great scarcity owing to drought, and once that they had been summoned to a gathering at the king's kraal near Ulundi. At any rate they were not there, and the few who did appear stared at us strangely.

Moreover, I noticed that they were not allowed to speak to us. Also Heda was kept in the cart and Nombé insisted that the rear canvas curtain should be closed and a blanket fastened behind Anscombe, who drove, evidently with the object that she should not be seen. Further, on the plea of weariness, from the time that we entered Zulu territory, Nombé asked to be allowed to ride in the cart with Kaatje and Heda, her real reason, as I was sure, being that she might keep a watch upon them. Lastly we traveled by little-frequented tracks, halting at night in out-of-the-way places, where, however, we always found food awaiting us, doubtless by arrangement.

With one man whom I had known in past days and who recognized me, I did manage to have a short talk. He asked me what I was doing in Zululand at that time. I replied that I was on a visit to Zikali, whereon he said that I should be safer with him than with any one else.

Our conversation went no further, for just then one of Nombé's servants appeared and made some remark to the man of which I could not catch the meaning, whereon he promptly turned and departed, leaving me wondering and uneasy.

Evidently we were being isolated, but when I remonstrated with Nombé she only answered with her most unfathomable smile:

"Oh! Macumazahn, you must ask Zikali of all these things. I am no one and know nothing, who only do what my master tells me is for your good."

"I am minded to turn and depart from Zululand," I said angrily, "for in this low veld whither you have led us there is fever and the horses will catch sickness or be bitten by the tsetse fly and perish."

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"I can not say, Macumazahn, who only travel by the road my master pointed out. Yet if you will be guided by me, you will not try to leave Zululand."

"You mean that I am in a trap, Nombé."

"I mean that the country is full of soldiers and that all white men have fled from it. Therefore, even if you were allowed to pass because the Zulus love you, Macumazahn, it might well happen that those with you would stay behind, sound asleep, Macumazahn, for which, like you, I should be sorry."

After this I said no more, for I knew that she meant to warn me. We had entered on this business and must see it through to it end, sweet or bitter.

As for Anscombe and Heda, their happiness seemed to be complete. The novelty of the life charmed them, and of its dangers they took no thought, being content to leave me, in whom they had a blind faith, to manage everything. Moreover, Heda, who in the joy of her love was beginning to forget the sorrow of her father's death and the other tragic events through which she had just passed, took a great fancy to the young witch-doctoress who conversed with her and taught her Zulu, which, having lived so much in Natal, she knew fairly well already. Indeed, when I suggested to her that to be over-trusting was not wise, she fired up and replied that she had been accustomed to natives all her life and knew how to judge them, adding that she had every confidence in Nombé.

After this I held my tongue and said no more of my doubts. What was the use since Heda would not listen to them, and at that time Anscombe was nothing but her echo?

So this, for me, very dull journey continued, till at length, after being held up for a couple of days by a flooded river where there was nothing to do but sit and smoke, as Nombé requested me not to make a noise by shooting at the big game that abounded, we began to emerge from the bush-veld on to the lovely uplands in the neighborhood of Nongoma.

Leaving these on our right we headed for a place called Ceza, a natural stronghold consisting of a flat plain on the top of a mountain, which plain is surrounded by bush. It is at the foot of this stronghold that the Black Kloof lies, being one of the ravines that run up into the mountain.

So thither we came at last. It was drawing toward sunset, a tremendous and stormy sunset, as we approached the place, and lo! it looked exactly as it had done when first I saw it more than a score of years before, forbidding as the mouth of hell, vast and lonesome.

There stood the columns of boulders fantastically piled one upon another; there grew the sparse trees upon its steep sides, mingled with aloes that looked like the shapes of men; there was the granite bottom swept almost clean by floods in some dim age, and the little stream that flowed along it. There, too, was the spot where once I had outspanned my wagons on the night when my servants swore that they saw the Imikovu, or wizard-raised specters, floating past them on the air in the shapes of the princes and others who were soon to fall at the battle of the Tugela. Up it we went, I riding and Nombé, who had descended from the cart that followed, walking by my side and watching me.

"You seem sad, Macumazahn," she said at length.

"Yes, Nombé, I am sad. This place makes me so."

"Is it the place, Macumazahn, or is it the thought of one whom once you met in the place, one who is dead?"

I looked at her, pretending not to understand, and she went on—

"I have the gift of vision, Macumazahn, which comes at times to those of my trade, and now and again, amongst others, I have seemed to see the spirit of a certain woman haunting this kloof as though she were waiting for some one."

"Indeed, and what may that woman be like?" I inquired carelessly.

"As it chances I can see her now gliding backward in front of you just there, and therefore am able to answer your question, Macumazahn. She is tall and slender, beautifully made, and light-colored for one of us black people. She has large eyes like a buck, and her eyes are full of fire that does not come from the sun but from within. Her face is tender yet proud, oh, so proud that she makes me afraid.

"She wears a cloak of gray fur, and about her neck there is a circlet of big blue beads with which her fingers play. A thought comes from her to me. These are the words of the thought: 'I have waited long in this dark place, watching by day and night till you,

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the Watcher-by-Night, return to meet me here. At length you have come, and in this enchanted place my hungry spirit can feed upon your spirit for a while. I thank you for coming, who now am no more lonely. Fear nothing, Macumazahn, for by a certain kiss I swear to you that till the appointed hour when you become as I am, I will be a shield upon your arm and a spear in your hand.' Such are the words of her thought, Macumazahn, but she has gone away and I hear no more. It was as though your horse rode over her and she passed through you."

Then, like one who wished to answer no questions, Nombé turned and went back to the cart, where she began to talk indifferently with Heda, for as soon as we entered the kloof her servants had drawn back the curtains and let fall the blanket.

As for me, I groaned, for of course I knew that Zikali, who was well acquainted with the appearance of Mameena, had instructed Nombé to say all this to me in order to impress my mind for some reason of his own. Yet he had done it very well, for such words Mameena might well have uttered could her great spirit have returned to walk the earth again. Was such a thing possible, I wondered? No, it was not possible, yet it was true that her atmosphere seemed to cling about this place and that my imagination, excited by memory and Nombé's suggestions, seemed to apprehend her presence.

AS I reflected the horse walked round the little bend in the ever-narrowing cliffs, and there in front of me, under the gigantic mass of overhanging rock, appeared the kraal of Zikali surrounded by its reed fence. The gate of the fence was open, and beyond it, on his stool in front of the large hut, sat Zikali.

Even from that distance it was impossible to mistake his figure, which was like no other that I had known in the world. A broad-shouldered dwarf with a huge head, deep, sunken eyes and snowy hair that hung upon his shoulders; the whole frame and face pervaded with an air of great antiquity, and yet owing to the plumpness of the flesh and that freshness of skin which is sometimes seen in the aged, comparatively young-looking. Such was the great wizard Zikali, known throughout the land for longer than any living man could remember as Opener of Roads, a title that referred to his powers of spiritual vision, also as the Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born, a name given to him by Chaka, the first and greatest of the Zulu kings, because of his deformity.

There he sat, silent, impassive, staring open-eyed at the red ball of the setting sun, looking more like some unshapely statue than a man. His silent, fierce-faced servants appeared. To me they looked like the same men whom I had seen here three and twenty years before, only grown older. Indeed, I think they were, for they greeted me by name and saluted by raising their broad spears.

I dismounted and waited while Anscombe, whose foot was now quite well again, helped Heda from the cart which was led away by the servants. Anscombe, who seemed a little oppressed, remarked that this was a strange place.

"Yes," said Heda, "but it is magnificent. I like it."

Then her eye fell upon Zikali seated before the hut and she turned pale.

"Oh! What a terrible-looking man!" she murmured. "If he is a man."

The maid Kaatje saw him also and uttered a little cry.

"Don't be frightened, dear," said Anscombe, "he is only an old dwarf."

"I suppose so," she exclaimed doubtfully, "but to me he is like the devil."

Nombé slid past us. She threw off the kaross she wore and for the first time appeared naked except for her mucha about her middle, and her ornaments. Down she went on her hands and knees and in this huble posture crept toward Zikali.

Arriving in front of him she touched the ground with her forehead, then, lifting her right arm, gave him the salute of Makosi, to which as a great wizard he was entitled, being supposed to be the home of many spirits. So far as I could see he took no notice of her.

Presently she moved and squatted herself down on his right hand, while two of his attendants appeared from behind the hut and took their stand between him and its doorway, holding their spears raised. About a minute later Nombé beckoned to us to approach, and we went forward across the courtyard, I a little ahead of the others.

As we drew near, Zikali opened his mouth and uttered a loud and terrifying laugh. How well I remembered that laugh which I had first heard at Dingaan's kraal as a boy after the murder of Retief and the Boers.

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"I begin to think that you are right and that this old gentleman must be the devil," said Anscombe to Heda, then lapsed into silence.

As I was determined not to speak first I took the opportunity to fill my pipe. Zikali, who was watching me, although all the while he seemed to be staring at the setting sun, made a sign.

One of the servants dashed away and immediately returned, bearing a flaming brand which he proffered to me as a pipe-lighter. Then he departed again to bring three carved stools of red wood which he placed for us. I looked at mine and knew it again by the carvings. It was the same on which I had sat when first I met Zikali. At length he spoke.

"Many years have gone by, Macumazahn, since you made use of that stool. They are cut in notches upon the leg you hold, and you may count them if you will."

I examined the leg. There were the notches, twenty-two or three of them. On the other legs were more notches too numerous to reckon.

"Do not look at those, Macumazahn, for they have nothing to do with you. They tell the years since the first of the House of Senzangacona sat upon that stool, since Chaka sat upon it, since Dingaan and others sat upon it, one Mameena among them. Well, much has happened since it served you for a rest. You have wandered far and seen strange things and lived where others would have died because it was your lot to live, of all of which we will talk afterwards. And now when you are grey you have come back here, as the Opener of Roads told you you would do, bringing with you new companions, you who have the art of making friends even when you are old, which is one given to few men. Where are those with whom you used to company, Macumazahn? Where are Saduko and Mameena and the rest? All gone except the Thing - who - should-never-have-been-born," and again he laughed loudly.

"And who it seems has never learned when to die," I remarked, speaking for the first time.

"Just so, Macumazahn, because I cannot die until my work is finished. But thanks be to the spirits of my fathers and to my own whom I live on to glut with vengeance, the end draws near at last, and as I promised you in the dead days, you shall have your share in it, Macumazahn."

He paused, then continued, still staring at the sinking sun, which made his remarks about us, whom he did not seem to see, uncanny:

"That white man with you is brave and well-born, one who loves fighting, I think, and the maiden is fair and sweet, with a high spirit. She is thinking to herself that I am an old wizard whom, if she were not afraid of me, she would ask to tell her her fortune. See, she understands and starts. Well, perhaps I will one day. Meanwhile, here is a little bit of it:

"She will have five children, of whom two will die and one will give her so much trouble that she will wish it had died also. But who their father will be I do not say. Nombé my child, lead away this White One and her woman to the hut that has been made ready for her, for she is weary and would rest. See, too, that she lacks for nothing which we can give her who is our guest. Let the white lord, Mauriti, accompany her to the hut and be shown that next to it in which he and Macumazahn will sleep, so that he may be sure that she is safe, and attend to the horses if he wills. There is a place to tether them behind the huts, and the men who traveled with you will help him. Afterward, when I have spoken with him, Macumazahn can join them that they may eat before they sleep."

These directions I translated to Anscombe who went gladly enough with Heda, for I think they were afraid of the terrible old dwarf and did not desire his company in the gathering gloom.

"The sun sinks once more, Macumazahn," he said when they were gone, "and the air grows chill. Come with me now into my hut where the fire burns, for I am aged and the cold strikes through me. Also there we can be alone."

So speaking he turned and crawled into the hut, looking like a gigantic white-headed beetle as he did so, a creature, I remembered, to which I had once compared him in the past. I followed, carrying the historic stool, and when he had seated himself on his kaross on the further side of the fire, took up my position opposite to him. This fire was fed with some kind of root or wood that gave a thin clear flame with little or no smoke. Over it he crouched, so closely that his great head seemed to be almost in the

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flame at which he stared with unblinking eyes as he had done at the sun, circumstances which added to his terrifying appearance and made me think of a certain region and its inhabitants.

"Why do you come here, Macumazahn?" he asked after studying me for a while through that window of fire.

"Because you brought me, Zikali, partly through your messenger, Nombé, and partly by means of a dream which she says you sent."

"Did I, Macumazahn? If so, I have forgotten it. Dreams are as many as gnats by the water; they bite us while we sleep, but when we wake up we forget them. Also it is foolishness to say that one man can send a dream to another."

"Then your messenger lied, Zikali, especially as she added that she brought it."

"Of course she lied, Macumazahn. Is she not my pupil whom I have trained from a child? Moreover, she lied well, it would seem, who guessed what sort of a dream you would have when you thought of turning your steps to Zululand."

"Why do you play at sticks (*i. e.* fence) with me, Zikali, seeing that neither of us are children?"

"Oh! Macumazahn, that is where you are mistaken, seeing that both of us, old though we be and cunning though we think ourselves, are nothing but babes in the arms of Fate. Well, well, I will tell you the truth, since it would be foolish to try to throw dust into such eyes as yours. I knew that you were down in Sekukuni's country and I was watching you—through my spies. You have been nowhere during all these years that I was not watching you—through my spies. For instance, that Arab-looking man named Harût, whom first you met at a big kraal in a far country, was a spy of mine. He has visited me lately and told me much of your doings. No, don't ask me of him now who would talk to you of other matters——"

"Does Harût still live then, and has he found a new god in place of the Ivory Child?" I interrupted.

"Macumazahn, if he did not live, how could he visit and speak with me? Well, I watched you there by the Oliphant's River where you fought Sekukuni's people, and afterward in the marble hut where you found the old white man dead in his chair and got the writings that you have in your pocket that concern the maiden Heddana; also afterward when the white man, your friend, killed the doctor who fell into a mud hole and the Basutos stole his cattle and wagon."

"How do you know all these things, Zikali?"

"Have I not told you—through my spies. Was there not a half-breed driver called Footsack, and do not the Basutos come and go between the Black Kloof and Sekukuni's town, bearing me tidings?"

"Yes, Zikali, and so does the wind and so do the birds."

"True! Oh! Macumazahn, I see that you are one who has watched Nature and its ways as closely as my spies watch you. So I learned these matters and knew that you were in trouble over the death of these white men, and your friends likewise, and as you were always dear to me, I sent that child Nombé to bring you to me, thinking from what I knew of you that you would be more likely to follow a woman who is both wise and good to look at, than a man who might be neither. I told her to say to you that you and the others would be safer here than in Natal at present. It seems that you hearkened and came. That is all."

"Yes, I hearkened and came. But, Zikali, that is not all, for you know well that you sent for me for your own sake, not for mine."

"Oh! Macumazahn, who can prevent a needle from piercing cloth when it is pushed by a finger like yours? Your wits are too sharp for me, Macumazahn; your eyes read through the blanket of cunning with which I would hide my thought. You speak truly. I did send for you for my own sake as well as for yours. I sent for you because I wanted your counsel, Macumazahn, and because Cetewayo also wants your counsel, and I wished to see you before you saw Cetewayo. Now you have the whole truth."

"What do you want my counsel about, Zikali?"

He leaned forward till his white locks almost seemed to mingle with the thin flame, through which he glared at me with eyes that were fiercer than the fire.

"Macumazahn, you remember the story that I told you long ago, do you not?"

"Very well, Zikali. It was that you hate the House of Senzangacona which has given all its kings to Zululand. First, because you are one of the Dwandwe tribe whom the Zulus crushed and mocked at. Secondly,

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because Chaka the Lion named you the Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born and killed your wives, for which crime you brought about the death of Chaka. Thirdly, because you have matched your single wit for many years against all the power of the royal House and yet kept your life in you, notably when Panda threatened you in my presence at the trial of one who has 'gone down,' and you told him to kill you if he dared. Now you would prove that you were right by causing your cunning to triumph over the royal House."

"True, quite true, O Macumazahn. You have a good memory, Macumazahn, especially for anything that has to do with that woman who has 'gone down.' I sent her down, but how was she named, Macumazahn? I forget, I forget, whose mind being old, falls suddenly into black pits of darkness—like her who went down."

He paused and we stared at each other through the veil of fire. Then as I made no answer, he went on:

"Oh! I remember now, she was called Mameena, was she not, a name taken from the wailing of the wind? Hark! It is wailing now."

I listened; it was, and I shivered to hear it, since but a minute before the night had been quite still. Yes, the wind moaned and wailed about the rocks of the Black Kloof.

"Well, enough of her. Why trouble about the dead when there are so many to be sent to join them? Macumazahn, the hour is at hand. The fool Cetewayo has quarreled with your people, the English, and on my counsel. He has sent and killed women, or allowed others to do so, across the river in Natal. His messengers came to me, asking what he should do. I answered, 'Shall a king of the blood of Chaka fear to allow his own wicked ones to be slain because they have stepped across a strip of water, and still call himself king of the Zulus?' So those women were dragged back across the water and killed; and now the Queen's man from the Cape asks many things, great fines of cattle, the giving up of the slayers, and that an end should be made of the Zulu army, which is to lay down its spears and set to hoeing like the old women in the kraals."

"And if the king refuses, what then, Zikali?"

"Then, Macumazahn, the Queen's man will declare war on the Zulus; already he gathers his soldiers for the war."

"Will Cetewayo refuse, Zikali?"

"I do not know. His mind swings this way and that, like a pole balanced on a rock. The ends of the pole are weighted with much counsel, and it hangs so even that if a grasshopper lit on one end or the other, it would turn the scale."

"And do you wish *me* to be that grasshopper, Zikali?"

"Who else? That is why I brought you to Zululand."

"So you wish me to counsel Cetewayo to lie down in the bed that the English have made for him. If he seeks my advice I will do so gladly, for so I am sure he will sleep well."

"Why do you mock me, Macumazahn? I wish you to counsel Cetewayo to throw back his word into the teeth of the Queen's man and to fight the English."

"And thus bring destruction on the Zulus and death to thousands of them and of my own people, and in return gain nothing but remorse. Do you think me mad or wicked, or both, that I should do this thing?"

"Nay, Macumazahn, you would gain much. I could show you where the king's cattle are hidden. The English will never find them, and after the war you might take as many as you chose. But it would be useless, for knowing you well, I am sure that you would only hand them over to the British Government, as once you handed over the cattle of Bangu, being fashioned that way by the Great-Great, Macumazahn."

"Perhaps I might, but then what should I gain, Zikali?"

"This: you would so bring things about that, being broken by war, the Zulu power could never again menace the White Men, which would be a great and good deed, Macumazahn."

"Mayhap—I am not sure. But of this I am sure, that I will not thrust my head into your nest of wasps, that the English hornets may steal the honey when they are disturbed. I leave such matters to the Queen and those who rule under her. So have done with such talk, for you do but waste your breath, Zikali."

"It is as I guessed it would be," he answered, shaking his great head. "You are too honest to prosper in the world, Macumazahn. Well, I must find other means

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to bring the House of Cetewayo to the end that he deserves, who has been an evil and a cruel king."

All this he said, showing neither surprise nor resentment which convinced me of what I had suspected throughout, that never for an instant did he believe that I should fall in with his suggestions and try to influence the Zulus to declare war. No, this talk of his was but a blind; there was some deeper scheme at work in his cunning old brain which he was hiding from me.

Why exactly had he beguiled me to Zululand? I could not divine, and to ask him would be worse than useless, but then and there I made up my mind that I would get away from the Black Kloof early on the following morning, if that were possible.

He began to speak of other matters in a low, droning voice, like a man who converses with himself. Sad, all of them, such as the haunted death of Saduko who had betrayed his lord, the Prince Umbelazi, because of a woman, every circumstance of which seemed to be familiar to him.

I made no answer, who was waiting for an opportunity to leave the hut, and did not care to dwell on these events. He ceased and brooded for a while, then said suddenly:

"You are hungry and would eat, Macumazahn, and I who eat little would sleep, for in sleep the multitudes of Spirits visit me, bringing tidings from afar. Well, we have spoken together and of that I am glad, for who knows when the chance will come again, though I think that soon we shall meet at Ulundi, Ulundi where Fate spreads its net. What was it I had to say to you? Ah! I remember. There is one who is always in your thoughts and whom you wish to see, one too who wishes to see you. You shall, you shall in payment for the trouble you have taken in coming so far to visit a poor old Zulu doctor whom, as you told me long ago, you know to be nothing but a cheat."

He paused and, why I could not tell, I grew weak with fear of I knew not what, and bethought me of flight.

"It is cold in this hut, is it not?" he went on. "Burn up, fire, burn up!" and plunging his hand into a catskin bag of medicines which he wore, he drew out some powder which he threw upon the embers that instantly burst into bright flame.

"Look now, Macumazahn," he said, "look to your right."

I looked, and oh! Heaven, there before me with outstretched arms and yearning on her face, stood Mameena, Mameena as I had seen her after I gave her the promised kiss that she used to cover her taking of the poison. For five seconds, mayhap, she stood thus, the fierce light showing all. Then the flame died down again and she was gone.

I turned and next instant was out of the hut, pursued by the terrible laugh of Zikali.

CHAPTER XII

TRAPPED

OUTSIDE in the cool night air I recovered myself, sufficiently at any rate to be able to think, and saw at once that the thing was an illusion for which Zikali had prepared my mind very carefully by means of the young witch-doctoress, Nombé. He knew well enough that this remarkable woman, Mameena, had made a deep impression on me nearly a quarter of a century before, as she had upon other men with whom she had been associated.

Therefore it was probable that she would always be present to my thought, since whatever a man forgets, he remembers the women who have shown him favor, true or false, for Nature has decreed it thus. Moreover, this was one to be remembered for herself, since she was beautiful and most attractive in her wild way. Also she had brought about a great war causing the death of thousands, and lastly her end might fairly be called majestic.

All these impressions Zikali had instructed Nombé to revivify by her continual allusions to Mameena, and lastly by her pretense that she saw her walking in front of me. Then when I was tired and hungry, in that place which for me was so closely connected with this woman, and in his own uncanny company, either by mesmerism or through the action of the drug he threw upon the fire, he had succeeded in calling up the illusion of her presence to my charmed sight. All this was clear enough; what remained obscure was his object.

Possibly he had none beyond an impish desire to frighten me, which is common enough among practitioners of magic in all lands. Well, for a little while he had

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succeeded, although to speak truth I remained uncertain whether in a sense I was not more thrilled and rejoiced than frightened.

Mameena had never been so ill to look upon, and I knew that dead or living I had nothing to fear from her who would have walked through hell fire for my sake, would have done anything, except perhaps sacrifice her ambition. No, even if this were her ghost I should have been glad to see her again.

But it was not a ghost; it was only a fancy reproduced exactly as my mind had photographed her, almost as my eyes last saw her, when her kiss was still warm upon my lips.

Such were my thoughts as I stood outside that hut with the cold perspiration running down my face, for to tell the truth my nerves were upset, although without reason. So upset were they that when suddenly a silent-footed man appeared out of the darkness I jumped as high as if I had set my foot on a puff-adder, and until I recognized him by his voice as one of Nombé's servants who had accompanied us from Swazi-Land, felt quite alarmed.

As a matter of fact he had only come to tell me that our meal was ready and that the other "high White Ones" were waiting for me.

He led me round the fence that encircled Zikali's dwelling-place, to two huts which stood almost against the face of the rock which, overhanging in a curve, formed a kind of natural roof above them. I thought they must have been built since I visited the place, as I, who have a good memory for such things, did not remember them.

Indeed, on subsequent examination I found that they were quite new, for the poles that formed their uprights were still green and the grass of the thatch was scarcely dry. It looked to me as if they had been specially built for our accommodation.

In one of these huts, that to the right which was allotted to Anscombe and myself, I found the others waiting for me, also the food. It was good of its sort and well cooked, and we ate it by the light of some candles that we had with us, Kaatje serving us. Yet, although a little while before I had been desperately hungry, now my appetite seemed to have left me and I made but a poor meal. Heda and Anscombe also seemed oppressed and ate sparingly.

We did not talk much until Kaatje had taken away the tin plates and gone to eat her own supper by a fire that burned outside the hut. Then Heda broke out, saying that she was terrified of this place and especially of its master, the old dwarf, and felt sure that something terrible was going to happen to her. Anscombe did his best to calm her, and I also told her she had nothing to fear.

"If there is nothing to fear, Mr. Quatermain," she answered, turning on me, "why do you look so frightened yourself? By your face you might have seen a ghost."

This sudden and singularly accurate thrust, for after all I had seen something that looked very like a ghost, startled me, and before I could invent any soothing and appropriate fib, Nombé appeared, saying that she had come to lead Heda to her sleeping-place. After this, further conversation was impossible since, although Nombé knew but few words of English, she was a great thought-reader and I feared to speak of anything secret in her presence. So we all went out of the hut, Nombé and I drawing back a little to the fire while the lovers said good night to each other.

"Nombé," I said, "the Inkosikazi Heddana is afraid. The rocks of this kloof lie heavy on her heart; the face of the Opener of Roads is fearful to her and his laughter grates upon her ears. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Macumazahn, and it is as I expected. When you yourself are frightened it is natural that she, an untried maiden, should be frightened also in this home of spirits."

"It is men we fear, not spirits, now when all Zululand is boiling like a pot," I replied angrily.

"Have it as you will, Macumazahn," she said, and at that moment her quiet, searching eyes and fixed smile were hateful to me. "At least you admit that you do fear. Well, for the lady Heddana fear nothing. I sleep across the door of her hut, and while I who have learned to love her, live, I say—for her fear nothing, whatever may chance or whatever you may hear."

"I believe you, but, Nombé, you might die."

"Yes, I may die, but be sure of this, that when I die she will be safe, and he who loves her also. Sleep well, Macumazahn, and do

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not dream too much of what you heard and saw in Zikali's house."

Then before I could speak she turned and left me.

I DID *not* sleep well; I slept very badly. To begin with, Maurice Anscombe, generally the most cheerful and nonchalant of mortals with a jest for every wo, was in a most depressed condition, and informed me of it several times, while I was getting ready to turn in. He said he thought the place hateful and felt as if people he could not see were looking at him. I had the same sensation but did not mention the fact to him.

When I told him he was talking stuff, he only replied that he could not help it, and pointed out that it was not his general habit to be downcast in any danger, which was quite true. Now, he added, he was enjoying much the same sensations as he did when first he saw the Yellow Wood Swamp and got the idea into his head that he would kill some one there, which happened in due course.

"Do you mean that you think you are going to kill somebody else?" I asked.

"No," he answered, "I think I am going to be killed, or something like it, probably by that accursed old villain of a witch-doctor, who I don't believe is altogether human."

"Others have thought that before now, Anscombe, and to be plain, I don't know that he is. He lives too much with the dead to be like other people."

"And with Satan, to whom I expect he makes sacrifices. The truth is I'm afraid of his playing some of his tricks with Heda. It is for her I fear, not for myself, Allan. Oh! why on earth did you come here?"

"Because you wished it and it seemed the safest thing to do. Look here, my boy, as usual the trouble comes through a woman. When a man's single—you know the rest. You used to be able to laugh at anything, but now that you are practically double you can't laugh any more. Well, that's the common lot of man and you've got to put up with it. Adam was pretty jolly in his garden until Eve was started, but you know what happened afterward. The rest of his life was a compound of temptation, anxiety, family troubles, remorse and hard labor, with primitive instruments and a flaming sword behind him. If you had left your Eve alone you would have escaped all this. But you see you didn't, and as a matter of fact, nobody ever does who is worth his salt, for Nature has arranged it so."

"You appear to talk with experience, Allan," he retorted blandly. "By the way, that girl Nombé, when she isn't star-gazing or muttering incantations, is always trying to explain to Heda some tale about you and a lady called Mameena. I gather that you were introduced to her somewhere in this neighborhood where, Nombé says, you were in the habit of kissing her in public, which sounds an odd kind of a thing to do; all of which happened before Nombé was born. She adds, according to Kaatje's interpretation, that you met her again this afternoon, which, as I understand the young woman has been long dead, seems so incomprehensible that I wish you would explain."

"With reference to Heda," I said, ignoring the rest as unworthy of notice, "I think you may make your mind easy. Zikali knows that she is in my charge and I don't believe that he wants to quarrel with me. Still, as you are uncomfortable here, the best thing to do will be to get away as early as possible tomorrow morning, where to we can decide afterward. And now I am going to sleep, so please stop arguing."

As I have already hinted, my attempts in the sleep line proved a failure, for whenever I did drop off I was pursued by bad dreams, which resulted from lying down so soon after supper. I heard the cries of desperate men in their mortal agony. I saw a rain-swollen river; its waters were red with blood.

I beheld a vision of one who I knew by his dress to be a Zulu king, although I could not see his face. He was flying and staggering with weariness as he fled. A great hound followed him. It lifted its head from the spoor; it was that of Zikali set upon the hound's body, Zikali who laughed instead of baying.

Then one whose copper ornaments tinkled as she walked, entered and sat beside me, whispering into my ear. A quarter of a hundred years have gone by since we talked together in this haunted kloof, she seemed to whisper, and before we talk again face to face there remain to pass of years— Here she ceased, though naturally I should have liked to hear the number. But that is just where dreams break down. They tell

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us only of what we know, or can evolve therefrom. Of what it is impossible for us to know they tell us nothing—at least as a general rule.

I woke up with a start, and feeling stifled in that hot hut and aggravated by the sound of Anscombe's peaceful breathing, threw a coat about me and, removing the door-board, crept into the air. The night was still, the stars shone, and at a little distance the embers of the fire still glowed. By it was seated a figure wrapped in a kaross.

The end of a piece of wood that the fire had eaten through, fell on to the red ashes and flamed up brightly. By its light I saw that the figure was Nombé's. The eternal smile was still upon her face, that smile which suggested a knowledge of hidden things that from moment to moment amused her soul. Her lips moved as if she were talking to an invisible companion, and from time to time, like one who acts upon directions, she took a pinch of ashes and blew them, either toward Heda's hut or ours. Yes, she did this when all decent young women should have been asleep, like one who keeps some unholy, midnight assignation.

Talking with her master, Zikali, or trying to cast spells upon us, confound her, thought I to myself, and very silently crept back into the hut. Afterward it occurred to me that she might have had another motive, namely of watching to see that none of us left the huts.

The rest of the night went by somehow. Once, listening with all my ears, I thought that I caught the sound of a number of men tramping and of some low word of command, but as I heard no more, concluded that fancy had deceived me. There I lay, puzzling over the situation till my head ached, and wondering how we were to get clear of the Black Kloof and Zikali, and out of Zululand which I gathered was no place for white people at the moment.

It seemed to me that the only thing was to make a start for Dundee on the Natal border, and for the rest to trust to fortune. If we got into trouble over the death of Todd, unpleasant as this would be, the matter must be faced out, that was all. For even if any witness appeared against us, he had been killed in self-defense while trying to bring about our deaths at the hands of Basutos.

I could see now that I was foolish not to have taken this line from the first, but as I think I have already explained, what weighed with me was the terror of involving these young people in a scandal which might shadow all their future lives. Also some fate inch by inch had dragged me into Zululand. Fortunately in life there are few mistakes and even worse than mistakes that can not be repaired, if the wish toward reparation is real and earnest. Were it otherwise not many of us would escape destruction in one form or another.

Thus I reflected until at length light flowing faintly through the smoke-hole of the hut told me that dawn was at hand. Seeing it I rose quietly, for I did not wish to wake Anscombe, and left the hut.

My object was to find Nombé, who I hoped would still be sitting by the fire, and send her to Zikali with a message that I wished to speak with him at once. Glancing round me in the gray dawn I saw that she was gone and that as yet no one seemed to be stirring.

Hearing a horse snort at a little distance, I made my way toward the sound and discovered the cart and near by our beasts, tied up with a plentiful supply of forage in a little bay of the overhanging cliff. Since, so far as I could judge in that uncertain light, nothing seemed to be wrong with them except weariness, for three of them were still lying down, I walked on to the gate of the fence which surrounded Zikali's big hut, proposing to wait there until some one appeared by whom I could send my message.

I reached the gate which I tried and found to be fastened on its inner side. Then I sat down, lit my pipe and waited.

It was extraordinarily lonesome in that place; at least this was the feeling that came over me. No doubt the sun was up behind the Ceza Stronghold that I have mentioned, which towered high behind me, for the sky above grew light with the red rays of its rising. But all the vast Black Kloof with its huge fantastic rocks was still plunged in gloom, whereof the shadows seemed to oppress my heart, weary as I was with my wakeful night and many anxieties. I was horribly nervous also and, as it proved, not without reason.

Presently I heard rustlings on the farther side of the fence, as of people creeping about cautiously, and the sound of whispering.

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Then of a sudden the gate was thrown open and through it emerged about a dozen Zulu warriors, all of them ringed men, who instantly surrounded me, seated there upon the ground.

I looked at them and they looked at me for quite a long while, since following my usual rule, I determined not to be the first to speak. Moreover, if they meant to kill me there was no use in speaking. At length their leader, an elderly man with thin legs, a large stomach and a rather pleasant countenance, saluted politely, saying—

"Good morning, O Macumazahn."

"Good morning, O Captain, whose name and business I do not know," I answered.

"The winds know the mountain on which they blow, but the mountain does not know the winds which it can not see," he remarked with poetical courtesy; Zulu way of saying, "more people are acquainted with Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows."

"Perhaps, Captain; yet the mountain can feel the winds," and I might have added, smell them, for the Kloof was close and these Kaffirs had not recently bathed.

"I am named Goza and come on an errand from the king, O Macumazahn."

"Indeed, Goza, and is your errand to cut my throat?"

"Not at present, Macumazahn, that is, unless you refuse to do what the king wishes."

"And what does the king wish, Goza?"

"He wishes, Macumazahn, that you, his friend, should visit him."

"Which is just what I was on my way to do, Goza." This was not true, but it didn't matter, for in the words of the schoolgirl's definition, a lie is an abomination to the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble. "After we have eaten I and my friends will accompany you to the king's kraal at Ulundi."

"Not so, Macumazahn. The king said nothing about your friends, of whom I do not think he has ever heard any more than we have. Moreover, if your friends are white, you will do well not to mention them, since the order is that all white people in Zululand who have not come here by the king's desire, are to be killed at once, except yourself, Macumazahn."

"Is it so, Goza? Well, as you will have understood, I am alone here and have no friends. Only I did not wish to travel so early."

"Of course we understand that you are alone and have no friends, is it not so, my brothers?"

"Yes, yes, we understand," they exclaimed in chorus, one of them adding, "and shall so report to the king."

"What kind of blankets do you like; the plain grey ones or the white ones with the blue stripes?" I asked, desiring to confirm them in this determination.

"The grey ones are warmer, Macumazahn, and do not show dirt so much," answered Goza thoughtfully.

"Good, I will remember when I have the chance."

"The promise of Macumazahn is known from of old to be as a tree that elephants can not pull down and white ants will not eat," said the sententious Goza, thereby intimating his belief that some time or other they would receive those blankets.

As a matter of fact the survivors of the party and the families of the others did receive them after the war, for in dealing with natives I have always made a point of trying to fulfil any promise or engagement made for value received.

"And now," went on Goza, "will the Inkosi be pleased to start, as we have to travel far today?"

"Impossible," I replied. "Before I leave I must eat, for who can journey upon yesterday's food? Also I must saddle my horse and collect what belongs to me, and bid farewell to my host, Zikali."

"Of meat we have plenty with us, Macumazahn, and therefore you will not hunger on the way. Your horse and everything that is yours shall be brought after you, since were you mounted on that swift beast and minded to escape, how could we catch you with our feet, and did you please to shoot us with your rifle, how could we who have only spears, save ourselves from dying? As for the Opener of Roads, his servants have told us that he means to sleep all today that he may talk with spirits in his dreams, and therefore it is useless for you to wait to bid him farewell. Moreover, the orders of the king are that we should bring you to him at once."

After this for a time there was silence, while I sat immovable revolving the situation, and the Zulus regarded me with a benignant interest. Goza took his snuff-box from his ear, shook out some into the palm

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of his hand and, after offering it to me in vain, inhaled it himself.

"The orders of the king are (sneeze) that we should bring you to him alive if possible, and if not (sneeze) dead. Choose which you will, Macumazahn. Perhaps you may prefer to go to Ulundi dead, which would—ah, how strong is this stuff, it makes me weep like a woman—save you the trouble of walking. But if you prefer that we should carry you, be so good, Macumazahn, first to write the words which will cause the grey blankets to be delivered to us, for we know well that even your bones would desire to keep your promise. Is it not a proverb in the land from the time of the slaying of Bangu when you gave the cattle you had earned to Saduko's wanderers?"

I listened and an idea occurred to me.

"I hear you, Goza," I said, "and I will start for Ulundi on my feet to save you the trouble of carrying me. But as the times are rough and accidents may always happen; as, too, I wish to make sure that you should get those blankets, and it may chance that I shall arrive there on my back, first I will write words which, if they are delivered to the witch-doctoress Nombé, will, sooner or later, turn into blankets."

"Write the words quickly, Macumazahn, and they will be delivered," said Goza.

So I drew out my pocket-book and wrote:

There is treachery afoot and I think that Zikali is at the bottom of it. I am being carried off to Cetewayo at Ulundi, by a party of armed Zulus who will not allow me to communicate with you, probably by Zikali's orders. You must do the best you can for Heda and yourself. Escape to Natal if you are able. Of course I will help if I get the chance, but if war is about to break out Cetewayo may kill me.

I think that you can trust Nombé; also that Zikali does not wish to work you any ill unless he is obliged, though I have no doubt that he has trapped us here for some dark purpose of his own. Tell him through Nombé that if harm comes to you I will kill him if I live, and that if I die, I will settle the score with him afterwards. God save and bless you both. Keep up your courage and use your wits.

Your friend,

A. Q.

I tore out the sheet, folded, addressed it and presented it to Goza, remarking that although it seemed to be but paper, it really was fourteen blankets—if given at once to Nombé.

He nodded and handed it to one of his men, who departed in the direction of our huts. So, thought I to myself, Nombé knows all about this business, which means that it is being worked by Zikali. That is why she spoke to me as she did last night.

"It is time to start, Macumazahn, and I think you told us that you would prefer to do so on your feet," said Goza, looking suggestively at his spear.

"I am ready," I said, rising because I must.

For a moment I contemplated the door in the kraal fence, wondering whether it would be safe to bolt through it and take refuge with Zikali. No, it was not safe, since Zikali sat there in his hut pulling the strings and probably might refuse to see me. Moreover, it was likely enough that before I could find him one of those broad spears would find my heart. There was nothing to be done except submit. Still I did call out in a loud voice:

"Farewell, Zikali. I leave you without a present against my will who am being taken by soldiers to visit the king at Ulundi. When we meet again I will talk all this matter over with you."

There was no answer, and as Goza took the opportunity to say that he extremely disliked the noise of shouting, which sometimes made him do things that he afterward regretted, I became silent. Then we departed, I in the exact center of that guard of Zulus, heavy-hearted and filled with fears both for myself and those I left behind me.

DOWN the Black Kloof we tramped, emerging on the sunlit plain beyond without meeting any one. A couple of miles further on we came to a small stream where Goza announced we would halt to eat. So we ate of cold toasted meat which one of the men produced from a basket he carried, unpalatable food but better than nothing.

Just as we had finished I looked up and saw the soldier to whom my note had been given. He was leading my mare that had been saddled. On it were my large saddlebags packed with my belongings, also my thick overcoat, mackintosh, waterbottle, and other articles down to a bag of tobacco, a spare pipe and a box of wax matches. Moreover, the man carried my double-barreled Express rifle and a shotgun that could be used for ball, together with two bags of cartridges. Practically nothing belonging to me had been forgotten.

I asked him who had collected the things.

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He replied the doctoress Nombé had done so and had brought him the horse saddled to carry them. He did not know who saddled the horse as he had seen no one but Nombé to whom he had given the writing which she hid away. In answer to further questions, he said that Nombé had sent me a message. It was:

"I bid farewell to Macumazahn for a little while and wish him good fortune till we meet again. Let him not be afraid in the battle, for even if he is hurt it will not be to death, since those go with him whom he can not see, and protect him with their shields. Say to Macumazahn that I, Nombé, remember in the morning what I said in the night and that what seems to be quite lost is ofttimes found again. Wish him good fortune and tell him I am sorry that I had not time to cause his spare garments to be cleansed with water, but that I have been careful to find his little box with the white man's medicines."

I could extract nothing more from this soldier, who was either very stupid, or chose to appear so; nor indeed did I dare to put direct questions about the cart and those who traveled in it.

Soon we marched again, for Goza would not allow me to ride the horse, fearing that I should escape on it. Nor would he let me carry either of the guns lest I should make use of them.

All day we traveled, reaching the Nongoma heights in the late afternoon. On this beautiful spot we found a kraal situated where afterward a magistracy was built when we conquered the country, whence there is one of the finest views in Zululand. There was no one in the kraal except two old women who appeared to be deaf and dumb for all I could get out of them. These aged dames, however, or others who were hidden, had made ready for our arrival, since a calf lay skinned and prepared for cooking, and by it big gourds filled with Kaffir beer and *maas* or curdled milk.

In due course we ate of these provisions, and after we had finished I gave Goza a stiff tot of brandy, of which Nombé, or perhaps Anscombe, had thoughtfully sent a bottle with my other baggage. The strong liquor made the old fellow talkative and enabled me to get a good deal of information out of him. Thus I learned that certain demands, as to which he was rather vague, had been made upon Cetewayo by the English Government, and that the King was now considering whether he should accede to them or fight.

The Great Council of the nation was summoned to attend at Ulundi within a few days, when the matter would be decided. Meanwhile all the regiments were being gathered, or, as we should say, mobilized; an army, said Goza, greater than any that Chaka had ever led.

I asked him what I had to do with this business, that I, a peaceful traveler and an old friend of the Zulus, should be made prisoner and dragged off to Ulundi. He replied he did not know who was not in the council of the High Ones, but he thought that Cetewayo the King wished to see me because I was their friend, perhaps that he might send me as a messenger to the white people.

I asked him how the king knew that I was in the country, to which he replied that Zikali had told him I was coming, he did not know how, whereon he, Goza, was sent at once to fetch me. I could get no more out of him.

I wondered if it would be worth while to make him quite drunk and then attempt to escape on the horse, but gave up the idea. To begin with, his men were at hand and there was not enough brandy to make them all drunk. Also, even if I succeeded in winning away here in the heart of Zululand, it would not help Anscombe or Heda, and I should probably be cut off and killed before I could get out of the country. So I abandoned the plan and went to sleep instead.

Next morning we left Nongoma early in the hope of reaching Ulundi that evening if the Ivuna and Black Umfolozi Rivers proved fordable. As it chanced, although they were high, we were able to cross them, I seated on the horse which two of the Zulus led.

Next we tramped for miles through the terrible Bekameezi Valley, a hot and desolate place which the Zulus swear is haunted. So unhealthy is this valley, which is the home of large game, that whole kraals-full of people who have tried to cultivate the rich land, have died in it of fever, or fled away leaving their crops unreaped. Now no man dwells there. After this we climbed a terrible mount to the high land of Mahlabatini, and having eaten, pushed on once more.

At length we sighted the great hill-encircled plain of Ulundi which may be called

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the cradle of the Zulu race as, politically speaking, it was destined to be its coffin.

On the ridge to the west once stood the Nobamba kraal where dwelt Senzangacona, the father of Chaka the Lion. Nearer to the White Umfolozi was Panda's dwelling-place, Nodwengu, which once I knew so well, while on the slope of the hills of the north-east stood the town of Ulundi in which Cetewayo dwelt, bathed in the lights of sunset. Indeed it and all the vast plain were red as if with blood, red as they were destined to be on the coming day of the last battle of the Zulus.

CHAPTER XIII

CETEWAYO

IT WAS dark when at last we reached the Ulundi kraal, for the growing moon was obscured by clouds. Therefore I could see nothing and was only aware, by the sound of voices and the continual challenging, that we were passing through great numbers of men.

At length we were admitted at the eastern gate and I was taken to a hut where I at once flung myself down to sleep, being so weary that I could not attempt to eat. Next morning as I was finishing my breakfast in the little fenced courtyard of this guest-hut, Goza appeared and said that the king commanded me to be brought to him at once, adding that I must "speak softly" to him, as he was "very angry."

So off we went across the great cattle kraal where a regiment of young men, two thousand strong or so, were drilling with a fierce intensity which showed they knew that they were out for more than exercise. About the sides of the kraal also stood hundreds of soldiers, all of them talking and, it seemed to me, excited, for they stamped upon the ground and even jumped into the air to give point to their arguments. Suddenly some of them caught sight of me, whereon a truculent fellow called out:

"What does a white man at Ulundi at such a time, when even John Dunn dare not come? Let us kill him and send his head as a present to the English general across the Tugela. That will settle this long talk about peace or war."

Others of a like mind echoed this kind proposal, with the result that presently a score or so of them made a rush at me, brandishing their sticks, since they might not carry arms in the royal kraal. Goza did his best to keep them off, but was swept aside like a feather, or rather knocked over, for I saw him on his back with his thin legs in the air.

"You must climb out of this pit by yourself," he began, addressing me in his pompous and figurative way. Then somebody stamped on his face, and fixing his teeth in his assailant's heel, he grew silent for a while.

The truculent blackguard, who was about six feet three high and had a mouth like a wolf's throat, arrived in front of me and, bending down, roared out—

"We are going to kill you, White Man."

I had a pistol in my pocket and could perfectly well have killed *him*, as I was much tempted to do. A second's reflection showed me, however, that this would be useless and in a sense put me in the wrong, though when the matter came on for argument it would interest me no more. So I just folded my arms and, looking up at him, said—

"Why, Black Man?"

"Because your face is white," he roared.

"No," I answered, "because your heart is black and your eyes are so full of blood that you do not know Macumazahn when you see him."

"*Wow!*" said one. "It is Watcher-by-Night himself whom our fathers knew before us. Leave him alone."

"No," shouted the great fellow, "I will send him to watch where it is always night, I who keep a club for white rats," and he brandished his stick over me.

Now my temper rose. Watching my opportunity, I stretched out my right foot and hooked him round the ankle, at the same time striking up with all my force. My fist caught him beneath the chin and over he went backwards sprawling on the ground.

"Son of a dog!" I said. "If a single stick touches me, at least you shall go first," and whipping out my revolver, I pointed it at him.

He lay quiet enough, but how the matter would have ended I do not know, for passion was running high, had not Goza at this moment risen with a bleeding nose and called out:

"O Fools, would you kill the king's guest to whom the king himself has given

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safe-conduct? Surely you are pots full of beer, not men."

"Why not?" answered one. "This is the Place of Soldiers. The king's house is yonder. Give the old jackal a start of a length of ten assegais. If he reaches it first, he can shake hands with his friend, the king. If not we will make him into medicine."

"Yes, yes, run for it, Jackal," clamored the others, knocking their shields with their sticks, as men do who would frighten a buck, and opening out to make a road for me.

Now while all this was going on, with some kind of sixth sense I had noted a big man whose face was shrouded by a blanket thrown over his head, who very quietly had joined these drunken rioters, and vaguely wondered who he might be.

"I will not run," I said slowly, "that I may be saved by the king. Nay, I will die here, though some of you shall die first. Go to the king, Goza, and tell him how his servants have served his guest," and I lifted my pistol, waiting till the first stick touched me to put a bullet through the bully on the ground.

"There is no need," said a deep voice that proceeded from the draped man of whom I have spoken, "for the king has come to see for himself."

Then the blanket was thrown back, revealing Cetewayo, grown fat and much aged since last I saw him, but undoubtedly Cetewayo.

"*Bayéte!*" roared the mob in salute, while some of those who had been most active in the tumult tried to slip away.

"Let no man stir," said Cetewayo, and they stood as though they were rooted to the ground, while I slipped my pistol back into my pocket.

"Who are you, White Man," he asked, looking at me, "and what do you here?"

"The King should know Macumazahn," I answered, lifting my hat, "whom Dingaan knew, whom Panda knew well, and whom the King knew before he was a king."

"Yes, I know you," he answered, "although since we spoke together you have shrunk like an oxhide in the sun, and time has stained your beard white."

"And the King has grown fat like the ox on Summer grass. As for what I do here, did not the King send for me by Goza, and was I not brought like a baby in a blanket?"

"The last time we met," he went on, taking no heed of my words, "was yonder at Nodwengu when the witch Mameena was tried for sorcery, she who made my brother mad and brought about the great battle, in which you fought for him with the Amawombé regiment. Do you not remember how she kissed you, Macumazahn, and took poison between the kisses, and how before she grew silent she spoke evil words to me, saying that I was doomed to pull down my own House and to die as she died, words that have haunted me ever since and now haunt me most of all? I wish to speak to you concerning them, Macumazahn, for it is said in the land that this beautiful witch loved you alone and that you only knew her mind."

I made no reply, who was heartily tired of this subject of Mameena whom no one seemed able to forget.

"Well," he went on, "we will talk of that matter alone, since it is not natural that you should wish to speak of your dead darlings before the world," and with a wave of the hand he dismissed the matter.

Then suddenly his attitude changed. His face, that had been thoughtful and almost soft, became fierce, his form seemed to swell and he grew terrible.

"What was that dog doing?" he asked of Goza, pointing to the brute whom I had knocked down and who still lay prostrate on his back, afraid to stir.

"O King," answered Goza, "he was trying to kill Macumazahn because he is a white man, although I told him that he was your guest, being brought to you by the royal command. He was trying to kill him by giving him a start of ten spears' length and making him run to the *isigodhlo* (the king's house) and beating him to death with the sticks of these men if they caught him, which, as he is old and they are young, they must have done. Only the Watcher-by-Night would not run; no, although he is so small he knocked him to the earth with his fist, and there he lies. That is all, O King."

"Rise, dog," said Cetewayo, and the man rose trembling with fear, and, being bidden, gave his name, which I forget.

"Listen, dog," went on the king in the same cold voice. "What Goza says is true, for I saw and heard it all with my eyes and ears. You would have made yourself as the king. You dared to try to kill the king's guest to whom he had given safe-conduct,

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and to stain the king's doorposts with his blood, thereby defiling his house and showing him to the white people as a murderer of one of them whom he had promised to protect. Now, Macumazahn, do *you* say how he shall die, and I will have it done."

"I do not wish him to die," I answered. "I think that he and those with him were drunk. Let him go, O King."

"Aye, Macumazahn, I will let him go. See now, we are in the center of the cattle-kraal, and to the eastern gate is as far as to the *isigodhlo*. Let this man have a start of ten spears' length and run to the eastern gate, as he would have made Macumazahn run to the king's house, and let his companions, those who would have hunted Macumazahn, hunt him. If he wins through the gate he can go on to the Government in Natal and tell them of the cruelty of the Zulus. Only then, let those who hunted him be brought before me for trial and perhaps we shall see how they can run."

Now the poor wretch caught hold of my hand, begging me to intercede for him, but soldiers who had come up dragged him away and, having measured the distance allowed him, set him on a mark made upon the ground.

Presently at a word off he sped like an arrow, and after him went his friends, ten or more of them. I think they caught him just by the gate doubling like a hare, or so the shouts of laughter from the watching regiment told me, for myself I would not look.

"That dog ate his own stomach," said Cetewayo grimly, thereby indicating in native fashion that the biter had been bitten or the engineer hoist with his petard. "It is long since there has been a war in the land, and some of these young soldiers who have never used an assegai save to skin an ox or cut the head from a chicken, shout too loud and leap too high. Now they will be quieter, and while you stay here you may walk where you will in safety, Macumazahn," he added thoughtfully.

Then dismissing the matter from his mind, as we white people dismiss any trivial incident in a morning stroll, he talked for a few minutes to the commanding officer of the regiment that was drilling, who ran up to make some report to him, and walked back toward the *isigodhlo*, beckoning me to follow with Goza.

AFTER waiting for a little while outside the gate in the surrounding fence, a body-servant ordered us to enter, which we did to find the king seated on the shady side of his big hut quite alone. At a sign I also sat myself down upon a stool that had been set for me, while Goza, whose nose was still bleeding, squatted at my side.

"Your manners are not so good as they were once, Macumazahn," said Cetewayo presently, "or perhaps you have been so long away from the royal kraal that you have forgotten its customs."

I stared at him, wondering what he could mean, whereon he added with a laugh:

"What is that in your pocket? Is it not a loaded pistol, and do you not remember that it is death to appear before the king armed? Now I might kill you and have no blame, although you are my guest, for who knows that you are not sent by the English Queen to shoot me?"

"I ask the King's pardon," I said humbly enough. "I did not think about the pistol. Let your servants take it away."

"Perhaps it is safer in your pocket, where I saw you place it in the cattle-kraal, Macumazahn, than in their hands, which do not know how to hold such things. Moreover, I know that you are not one who stabs in the dark, even when our peoples growl round each other like two dogs about to fight, and if you were, in this place your life would have to pay for mine. There is beer by your side; drink and fear nothing. Did you see the Opener of Roads, Goza, and if so, what is his answer to my message?"

"O King, I saw him," answered Goza. "The Father of the doctors, the friend and master of the spirits, says he has heard the King's word, yes, that he heard it as it passed the King's lips, and that although he is very old, he will travel to Ulundi and be present at the Great Council of the nation which is to be summoned on the eighth day from this, that of the full moon. Yet he makes a prayer of the King. It is that a place may be prepared for him, for his people and for his servants who carry him, away from this town of Ulundi, where he may sojourn quite alone, a decree of death being pronounced against any who attempt to break in upon his privacy, either where he dwells or upon his journey.

"These are his very words: 'I, who am the most ancient man in Zululand, dwell

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with the spirits of my fathers, who will not suffer strangers to come nigh them and who, if they are offended, will bring great woes upon the land. Moreover, I have sworn that while there is a king in Zululand and I draw the breath of life, never again will I set foot in a royal kraal, because when last I did so at the slaying of the witch, Mameena, the king who is dead thought it well to utter threats against me, and never more will I, the Opener of Roads, be threatened by a mortal. Therefore if the King and his Council seek to drink of the water of my wisdom, it must be in the place and hour of my own choosing. If this can not be, let me abide here in my house and let the King seek light from other doctors, since mine shall remain as a lamp to my own heart.' "

Now I saw that these words greatly disturbed Cetewayo who feared Zikali, as indeed did all the land.

"What does the old wizard mean?" he asked angrily. "He lives alone like a bat in a cave and for years has been seen of none. Yet as a bat flies forth at night, ranging far and wide in search of prey, so does his spirit seem to fly through Zululand. Everywhere I hear the same word. It is—'What says the Opener of Roads?' It is—'How can aught be done unless the Opener of Roads has declared that it shall be done, he who was here before the Black One (Chaka) was born, he who it is said was the friend of Inkosi Umkulu, the father of the Zulus who died before our great-grandfathers can remember; he who has all knowledge and is almost a spirit, if indeed he be not a spirit?' I ask you, Macumazahn, who are his friends, what does he mean, and why should I not kill him and be done?"

"O King," I answered, "in the days of your uncle, Dingaan, when Dingaan slew the Boers who were his guests, and thus began the war between the White and the Black, I, who was a lad, heard the laughter of Zikali for the first time yonder at the kraal Ungungundhlovu, I who rode with Retief and escaped the slaughter, but his face I did not see. Many years later, in the days of Panda, your father, I saw his face and therefore you name me his friend. Yet this friend who drew me to visit him, perhaps by your will, O King, has now caused me to be brought here to Ulundi, doubtless by your will, O King, but against my own, for who wishes to come to a town where he is well-nigh slain by the first brawler he meets in the cattle kraal?"

"Yet you were not slain, Macumazahn, and perhaps you do not know all the story of that brawler," replied Cetewayo almost humbly, like one who begs pardon, though the rest of what I had said he ignored. "But still you are Zikali's friend, for between you and him there is a rope which enabled him to draw you to Zululand, which rope I have heard called by a woman's name. Therefore by the spirit of that woman, which still can draw you like a rope, I charge you, tell me—what does this old wizard mean, and why should I not kill him and be rid of one who haunts my heart like an evil vision of the night and, as I sometimes think, is an *umtakati*, an evil-doer who would work ill to me and all my House, yes, and to all my people?"

"How should I know what he means, O King?" I answered with indignation, though in fact I could guess well enough. "As for killing him, can not the King kill whom he will? Yet I remember that once I heard your father ask much the same question and of Zikali himself, saying that he was minded to find out whether or no he were mortal like other men. I remember also he answered that there was a saying that when the Opener of Roads came to the end of his road, there would be no more a king of Zululand, as there was none when first he set foot upon his road. Now I have spoken, who am a white man and do not understand your sayings."

"I remember it also, Macumazahn, who was present at the time," he replied heavily. "My father feared this Zikali and his father feared him, and I have heard that the Black One himself, who feared nothing, feared him also. And I, too, fear him, so much that I dare not make up my mind upon a great matter without his counsel, lest he should bewitch me and the nation and bring us to nothing."

He paused, then turning to Goza, asked—

"Did the Opener of Roads tell you where he wished to dwell when he comes to visit me here at Ulundi?"

"O King," answered Goza, "yonder in the hills, not further away than an aged man can walk in the half of an hour, is a place called the Valley of Bones, because there in the days of those who went before the King, and even in the King's day, many evil-doers have been led to die. Zikali would

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dwell in this Valley of Bones, and there and nowhere else would meet the King and the Great Council, not in the daylight but after sunset when the moon has risen."

"Why," said Cetewayo, starting, "the place is ill-omened and, they say, haunted, one that no man dares to approach after the fall of darkness for fear lest the ghosts of the dead should leap upon him gibbering."

"Such were the words of the Opener of Roads, O King," replied Goza. "There and nowhere else will he meet the King, and there he demands that three huts should be built to shelter him and his folk and stored with all things needful. If this be not granted to him, then he refuses to visit the King or to give counsel to the nation."

"So be it then," said Cetewayo. "Send messengers to the Opener of Roads, Goza, saying that what he desires shall be done. Let my command go out that under pain of death none spy upon him while he journeys hither or returns. Let the huts be built forthwith, and when it is known that he is coming, let food in plenty be placed in them and afterwards morning by morning taken to the mouth of the valley. Bid him announce his arrival and the hour he chooses for our meeting by messenger. Begone."

Goza leapt up, gave the royal salute, and retreated backwards from the presence of the king, leaving us alone. I also rose to depart, but Cetewayo motioned to me to be seated.

"Macumazahn," he said, "the Great Queen's man who has come to Natal (Sir Bartle Frere) threatens me with war because two evil-doing women were taken on the Natal side of the Tugela and brought back to Zululand and killed by Mehlokazulu, being the wives of his father, Sirayo, which was done without my knowledge, and two white men were driven away from an island in the Tugela River by some soldiers."

"Is that all, O King?" I asked.

"No. The Queen's man says I kill my people without trial, which is a lie told him by the missionaries, and that girls have also been killed who refused to marry those to whom they were given and ran away with other men; also that wizards are smelt out and slain, which happens but rarely now, contrary to the promises I made to Sompseu when he came to recognize me as king upon my father's death, and some other such small matters."

"What is demanded if you would avoid war, O King?"

"Nothing less than this, Macumazahn: That the Zulu army should be abolished and the soldiers allowed to marry whom and when they please, because, says the Queen's man, he fears lest it should be used to attack the English, as though I who love the English, as those have done who went before me, desire to lay a finger on them. Also that another Queen's man should be sent to dwell here in my country, to be the eyes and ears of the English Government and have power with me in the land; yes, and more demands which would destroy the Zulus as a people and make me, their king, but a petty kraal-head."

"And what will the King answer?" I asked.

"I know not what to answer. The fine of two thousand cattle I will pay for the killing of the women. If it may be, I wish no quarrel with the English, though gladly enough I would have fought the Dutch had not Sompseu stretched out his arm over their land. But how can I disband the army and make an end of the regiments that have conquered in so many wars?

"Macumazahn, I tell you that if I did this, in a moon I should be dead. Oh, you white people, think there is but one will in Zululand: that of the King. But it is not so, for he is but a single man among ten thousand thousand, who lives to work the people's wish. If he beats them with too thick a stick, or if he brings them to shame or does what the most of them do not wish, then where is the king? Then, I say, he goes a road that was trodden by Chaka and Dingaan who were before me, yes, the red road of the assegai. Therefore today I stand like a man between two falling cliffs. If I run toward the English the Zulu cliff falls upon me. If I run toward my own people, the English cliff falls upon me, and in either case I am crushed and no more seen. Tell me then, Macumazahn, you whose heart is honest, what must I do?"

So he spoke, wringing his hands, with tears starting to his eyes, and upon my word, although I never liked Cetewayo as I had liked his father, Panda, perhaps because I loved his brother, Umbelazi, whom he killed, and had known him do many cruel deeds, my heart bled for him.

"I can not tell you, King," I answered, thinking that I must say something, "but I

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pray you do not make war against the Queen, for she is the most mighty One in the whole earth, and though her foot, of which you see but the little toe here in Africa, seems small to you, yet if she is angered, it will stamp the Zulus flat, so that they cease to be."

"Many have told me this, Macumazahn. Yes, even Uhamu, the son of my uncle Unzibe, or, as some say, the son of his spirit, to which his mother was married after Unzibe was dead, and others throughout the land, and in truth I think it myself. But who can hold the army which shouts for war? *Ow!* The Council must decide, which means perhaps that Zikali will decide, for now all hang upon his lips."

"Then I am sorry," I exclaimed.

He looked at me shrewdly.

"Are you? So am I. Yet his counsel must be asked, and better that it should be here in my presence than yonder secretly at the Black Kloof. I would kill him if I dared, but I dare not, who am sure—why I may not say—that the same sun will see his death and mine."

He waved his hand to show that the talk on this matter was ended, then added:

"Macumazahn, you are my prisoner for a while, but give me your word that you will not try to escape and you may go where you will within an hour's ride of Ulundi. I would pay you well to stop here with me, but this I know you would never do should there be trouble between us and your people. Therefore I promise you that if war breaks out I will send you safely to Natal, or perhaps sooner, as my messenger, whence doubtless you will return to fight against me. Know that I have given orders that every other white man or woman who is found in Zululand shall be killed as a spy. Even John Dunn has fled or is flying, or so I hear, John Dunn who has fed out of my hand and grown rich on my gifts. You yourself would have been killed as you came from Swazi Land in your cart, had not command been sent to those chiefs through whose lands you passed that neither they nor their people were so much as to look at you."

Now for one intense moment I thought as hard as ever I had done in my life. It was evident—unless he were dealing very cunningly with me, which I did not believe—that Cetewayo knew nothing of Anscombe and Heda, but thought that I had come into Zululand alone.

Should I or should I not tell him and beg his protection for them? If I did so he might refuse or be unable to give it to them far away in the midst of a savage population aflame with the lust of war. As the incident of the morning showed, it was as much as he could do to protect myself, although the Zulus knew me for their friend.

On the other hand no one who dwelt under Zikali's blanket, to use the Kaffir idiom, would be touched, because he was looked on as half divine, and therefore everything under it down to the rat in his thatch was sacred. Now Zikali by implication, and Nombé with emphasis, had promised to safeguard these two. Surely, therefore, they would run less risk in the Black Kloof than here at Ulundi, if ever they got so far.

All this went through my brain in an instant, with the result that I made up my mind to say nothing.

As the issue proved, this was a terrible mistake, but who can always judge rightly? Had I spoken out it seems to me probable that Cetewayo would have granted my prayer and ordered that these two should be escorted out of Zululand before hostilities began, although of course they might have been murdered on the way. Also, for a reason that will become evident later, it is possible that there would never have been any hostilities.

All I can plead is, that I acted for the best and Fate would have it so. Another moment and the chance was gone.

The gate opened and a body-servant appeared, announcing that one of the great captains with some of his officers waited to see the king. Cetewayo made a sign, whereon the servant called out something, and they entered, three or four of them, saluting loudly.

Seeing me they stopped and stared, whereon Cetewayo shortly, but with much clearness, repeated to them and to an induna who accompanied them, what he had already said to me, namely that I was his guest, sent for by him that he might use me as a messenger if he thought fit. He added that the man who dared to speak a word against me, or even to look at me askance, should pay the price with his life, however high his station, and he commanded that the heralds should proclaim this his decree throughout Ulundi and the neighboring kraals. Then he held out his hand

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to me in token of friendship, bidding me to "go softly" and come to see him whenever I wished, and dismissed me in charge of the induna, one of the captains and some soldiers.

Within five minutes of reaching my hut I heard a loud-voiced crier proclaiming the order of the king and knew that I had no more to fear.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VALLEY OF BONES

THE week that followed my interview with Cetewayo was indeed a miserable time for me. For myself, as I have said, I had no fear, for the king's orders were strictly obeyed. Moreover, the tale of what had happened to the brute who wished to hunt me down in the cattle-kraal had traveled far and wide and none sought to share his fate.

My hut was inviolate and well supplied with necessary food, as was my mare, and I could wander where I liked and talk with whom I would. I could even ride to exercise the horse, though this I did very sparingly and only in the immediate neighborhood of the town for fear of exciting suspicion or meeting Zulus whom the king's word had not reached. Indeed on these occasions I was always accompanied by a guard of swift-footed and armed soldiers sent "to protect me," or more probably to kill me if I did anything that seemed suspicious.

In the course of my rambles I met sundry natives whom I had known in the old days, some of them a long while ago. They all seemed glad to see me and were quite ready to talk of past times, but of the present they would say little or nothing, except that they were certain there would be war.

Of Anscombe and Heda I could hear nothing, and indeed did not dare to make any direct inquiries concerning them, but several reliable men assured me that the last missionaries and traders having departed, there was not a white man, woman or child left in Zululand except myself. It was "all black" they said, referring to the color of their people, as it had been before the time of Chaka. So I was forced to eat out my heart with anxiety in silence, hoping and praying that Zikali had played an honest part and sent them away safely.

Why should he not have done so, seeing that it was my presence he had desired, not theirs? They were only taken, or rather snared, because they were with me and could not be separated or so I believed at the time.

One ray of comfort I did get. About the fifth day after my interview I saw Goza, who told me that the king's messengers were back from the Black Kloof and had brought "a word" for me from Zikali himself. The word was:

"Bid Goza say to Macumazahn that I was sorry not to see him to say goodby, because that morning I slept heavily. Bid him say that I am glad he has seen the king, since for this purpose I sought his presence in Zululand. Bid him say that he is to fear nothing, and that if his heart is heavy about others whom he loves, he should make it light again, since the spirits have them in their keeping as they have him, and never were they or he more safe than they are today."

Now I looked at Goza and asked if I could see this messenger. He replied, No, as he had already been despatched upon another errand. Then I asked him if the messenger had said anything else. He answered, yes, one thing that he had forgotten, namely that the writing about blankets should now be in Natal.

Then suddenly he changed the subject and asked me if I would like to accompany him to the Valley of Bones where he was ordered to inspect the huts which were being built for Zikali and his people. Of course I said I should, hoping, quite without result, that I might get something more out of him on the road.

Now this town of Cetewayo's stands, or rather stood, for it has long been burnt, on the slope of the hills to the northeast of the plains of Ulundi. Above it these hills grow steeper, and deep in the recesses of one of them is the Valley of Bones.

There is nothing particularly imposing about the place; no towering cliffs or pillars of piled granite, as at the Black Kloof. It is just a vale cut out by water, bordered by steep slopes on either side, and a still steeper slope strewn with large rocks at its end. Dotted here and there on these slopes grew tall aloes that from a little distance looked like scattered men, whereof the lower leaves were shriveled and blackened by veld fires.

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Also there were a few euphorbias, gray, naked-looking things that end in points like fingers on a hand, and amongst them some sparse thorn trees, struggling to live in an inhospitable soil.

The place has one peculiarity. Jutting into it from the hillside is a ridge or spur, sixty or seventy yards in length by perhaps twenty broad, that ends in a flat point of rock which stands about forty feet above the level of the rest of the little valley. On this ridge also grew tall aloes until near its extremity the soil ceased, or had been washed away from the water-worn core of rock.

It was, and no doubt still is, a desolate-looking spot, at any rate for most of the day when owing to the shadow of the surrounding hills, it receives but little sun. Everything about it, especially when I was there in a time of rain, seemed dank and miserable, although the flat floor of the kloof was clothed with a growth of tall, coarse grass, and weeds that bore an evil-smelling flower.

Perhaps some sense of appropriateness had caused the Zulu kings to choose this lonesome, deathly looking gorge as one of their execution grounds. At any rate many had been slain here, for skulls and the larger human bones, some of them black with age, lay all about among the grass, as they had been scattered by hyenas and jackals. They were particularly thick beneath and around the table-like rock that I have mentioned.

Goza told me that this was because the King's Slayers made a custom of dragging the victim along the projecting tongue to the edge of this rock and hurling him, either dead or living, to the ground beneath; or, in the case of witches; driving them over after they had been blinded.

Such was the spot that Zikali had selected to abide in during his visit to Ulundi. Certainly where privacy was an object it was well chosen, for, as Cetewayo had said and as Goza emphasized to me, it had the repute of being the most thoroughly haunted place in all Zululand, with the sole exception, perhaps, of the ridge opposite to Dingaan's old kraal where once I shot the vultures for my life and those of my companions. Even in the daytime people gave it a wide berth, and at night nothing would induce them to approach it, at any rate alone.

Here to one side of and near the root of the tongue of land of which I have spoken, the huts that Zikali had demanded for himself and his company were being rapidly built, close to a spring of water, by a large body of men who labored as if they wished to be done with their task.

Also, about half-way up the donga, for really it was nothing more, at a distance of perhaps five-and-twenty paces from its flat point whence the condemned were hurled, a circular space of ground had been cleared and leveled which was large enough to accommodate fifty or sixty men. On this space, Goza told me, the king and the Council were to sit when they came to seek light from Zikali.

In my heart I reflected that the light they were likely to get from him would be such as may be supposed to be thrown by hell fire. For be it remembered I knew what these people never seemed to understand, that Zikali was the most bitter of their enemies.

To begin with, he was of Undwandwe blood, one of the people whom the great king Chaka had destroyed. Then this same Chaka had robbed him of his wives and murdered his children, in revenge for which he had plotted the slaying of Chaka, as he did that of his brothers, Umhlangana and Dingaan, the latter of whom he involved in a quarrel with the Boers. Subsequently he brought about the war between the princes Cetewayo and Umbelazi, in which I played a part.

Now I was certain that he intended to bring about another war between the English and the Zulus, knowing well that in the end the latter would be destroyed, and with them the royal house of Senzangacona which he had sworn to level with the dust.

Had he not told me as much years ago, and was he one to go back upon his word? Had he not used Mameena with her beauty and ambitions as his tool, and when she was of no further service to him, given her to death, as he had used scores of others and in due season given them to death? Was I not myself perhaps one of those tools destined to be thrown into the pit of doom when my turn came, though in what way I could help his plots was more than I could see, since he knew well that I should do my best to oppose him? Oh! I had half a mind to go to Cetewayo and tell him all I knew about Zikali, even if it involved the breaking of confidences.

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But stay! Even if I were believed, this far-seeing wizard held hostages for my good behavior, and if I betrayed him what would happen to those hostages? He sent me messages saying that they were safe, suggesting that they had escaped to Natal. How was I to know that these were true?

I was utterly bewildered; I could not guess why I had been beguiled into Zululand, and I dared not step either this way or that for fear lest I should fall into some pit dug by his cunning hands and, what was worse, drag down others with me. Moreover, was this man quite human, or perhaps an emissary of Satan upon earth who had knowledge denied to other men and a certain mastery over the powers of ill? Again I could not say.

His term of life seemed to be extraordinarily prolonged, though none knew how old exactly he might be. Also he had a wonderful knowledge of what was passing in the minds of others, and by his arts, as I had experienced only the other day, could summon up apparitions or illusions before their eyes. Further, he was aware of events which had happened at a distance and could send or read dreams, since otherwise how did Nombé know what I had dreamt at Marnham's house? Lastly he could foretell the future, as once he had done in my own case, prophesying that I should be injured by a buffalo with a split horn.

Yet all of this might be nothing more than a mixture of keen observation, clever spying, trickery and mesmerism. I could not say which it was, nor can I with certainty to this hour.

SUCH were the thoughts that passed through my mind as I walked back from the Vale of Bones by the side of the big-paunched Goza, whom I caught eying me from time to time as a curious crow eyes any object that has attracted his attention.

"Goza," I said at last, "do the Zulus really mean to fight the English?"

He turned and pointed to a spot where the hills ran down into the great plain. Here two regiments were maneuvering. One of these held the slopes of the hill and the other was attacking them from the plain, so fiercely that at a distance their onslaught looked like that of actual warfare.

"That looks like fighting, does it not, Macumazahn," he replied.

"Yes, Goza, yet it may be but play."

"Quite so, Macumazahn. It may be fighting or it may be but play. Am I a prophet that I should be able to say which it is? Of that there is but one man in Zululand who knows the truth. It is he for whom the new huts are being built up yonder."

"You think he really knows, Goza?"

"No, Macumazahn, I do not think—I am sure. He is the greatest of all wizards, as he was when my father held on to his mother's apron. He holds the strings, and the great ones of the country dance. If he wishes war, there will be war. If he wishes peace, there will be peace."

"And which does he wish, Goza?"

"I thought perhaps you could tell me that, Macumazahn, who, he says, are such an old friend of his; also why he chooses to sojourn in a dark hole among the dead instead of in the sunshine among the living, here at Ulundi."

"Well, I can not, Goza, since the Opener of Roads does not open his heart to me but keeps his secrets to himself. For the rest, those who talk with the dead may prefer to dwell among the dead."

"Now as always you speak truth, Macumazahn," said Goza, looking at me in a way that suggested to me that he believed I spoke anything but the truth.

Indeed I am convinced he thought that I was in the counsel of Zikali and acquainted with his plans. Also I am sure he knew that I had not come to Zululand alone, the incident of the blankets showed it, which I had promised to him as a bribe to keep silence, and suspected that my companions were parties to some plot together with myself. And yet at that time I could not be quite sure, and therefore dared not ask anything concerning them lest thus I should reveal their existence and bring them to death.

As a matter of fact I need not have been anxious on this point, since if Goza, who I may state was a kind of secret service officer as well as head messenger, knew, as I think probable, he had been commanded by Zikali to hold his tongue under penalty of a curse. Perhaps the same was true of the soldiers who had come with him to take me to Ulundi. The hint of Zikali was as powerful as the word of the king, since they, like thousands of others, believed that whereas Cetewayo could kill them, Zikali,

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like Satan, could blast their spirits as well as their bodies. But how was I to guess all these things at that time?

During the next two days nothing happened, though I heard that there had been one if not two meetings of the Council at the King's House, during which the position of affairs was discussed. Cetewayo I did not see, although twice he sent messengers to me bringing gifts of food, who were charged to inquire whether I was well and happy and if any had offered me hurt or insult. To these I answered that I was well and unmolested but not happy, who grew lonesome, being but a solitary white man among so many thousands of the Zulus.

On the third morning, that of the day of the full moon, Goza came and informed me that Zikali had arrived at the Valley of Bones before dawn. I asked him how he, who was so old and feeble, had walked so far. He answered that he had not walked, or so he understood, but had been carried in a litter, or rather in two litters, one for himself and one for his "spirit." This staggered me even where Zikali was concerned, and I inquired what on earth he meant.

"Macumazahn, how can I tell you who only know what I myself am told?" he exclaimed. "Such is the report that the Opener of Roads has made himself by messengers to the king. None have seen him, for he journeys only in the night. Moreover, when Zikali passes all men are blind and even women's tongues grow dumb. Perchance by 'his spirit' he means his medicine or the witch-doctoress, Nombé, whom folks say he created, since none have seen her father or her mother, or heard who begat her; or perchance his snake is hid behind the mats of the second litter, if in truth there was one."

"It may be so," I said, feeling that it was useless to pursue the matter. "Now, Goza, I would see Zikali and at once."

"That can not be, Macumazahn, since he has given out that he will see no one, who rests after his journey, and the king has issued orders that any who attempt to approach the Valley of Bones shall die, even if they be of the royal blood. Yes, if so much as a dog dares to draw near that place, it must die. The soldiers who ring it round have killed one already, so strict are the orders, also a boy who went toward it searching for a calf, which I think a bad omen."

"Then I will send a message to him," I persisted.

"Do so," mocked Goza. "Look, yonder sails an eagle. Ask it to take your message, for nothing else will. Be not foolish, Macumazahn, but have patience, for tonight you shall see the Opener of Roads when he attends the Council of the king in the Valley of Bones. This is the order of the king —that at the rising of the moon I lead you thither, so that you may be present at the Council in case he wishes to ask you any questions about the White People or to give you any message to the Government in Natal. Therefore at sunset I will come for you. Till then, farewell. I have business that can not wait."

"Can I see the king?" I cried.

"Not so, Macumazahn. All today he makes sacrifice to the spirits of his ancestors and must not be approached," he called back as he departed.

Availing myself of the permission of the king to go where I would, a little later in the day I walked out of the town toward the Valley of Bones in order to ascertain for myself whether what Goza had told me was true. So it proved, for about three hundred yards from the mouth of the valley, which at that distance looked like a black hole in the hills, I found soldiers stationed about ten paces apart in a great circle which ran right up the hillside and vanished over the crest. Strolling up to one of these, whose face I thought I knew, I asked him if he would let me pass to see my friend, the Opener of Roads.

The man, who was something of a humorist replied:

"Certainly if you wish, Macumazahn. That is to say, I will let your spirit pass, but to do this, if you come one step nearer I must first make a hole in you with my spear out of which it can fly."

I thanked him for his information and gave him some snuff, which he took gratefully, being bored by his long vigil. Then I asked him how many people the great witch-doctor had with them. He said he did not know, but he had seen a number of tall men come to the mouth of the donga to fetch food that had been placed there.

Again I inquired if he had seen any women, whereon he replied none, Zikali being, he understood, too old to trouble himself about the other sex. Just then an officer, making his rounds, came up and looked at

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me so sternly that I thought it well to retreat. Evidently there was no chance of getting through that line.

On my way back I walked as near the fence of the king's house as I dared, and saw witch-doctors passing in and out in their hideous official panoply. This told me that here also Goza had spoken the truth—the king was performing magical ceremonies, which meant that it would be impossible to approach him.

In every direction I met with failure. The Fates were against me; it lay over me like a spell. Indeed I grew superstitious and began to think that Zikali had bewitched me, as he was said to have the power to do. Well, perhaps he had, for the mere fact of finding myself opposed by this persistent wall of difficulties and silence convinced me that there was something behind it to be learned.

I went back very dejected to my hut and talked to my mare which whinnied and rubbed its nose against me, for although it was well fed and looked after, the poor beast seemed as lonely as I was myself. No wonder, since like myself it was separated from all its kind and weary of inaction.

After this I ate and smoked and finally dozed, no more, for whenever I tried to go to sleep I thought that I heard Zikali laughing at me, as mayhap he was doing yonder in his hut.

At length that wearisome day drew toward its end. The sun began to sink, a huge red ball of fire, now and again veiled by clouds, for the sky was stormy. Its fierce rays, striking upon other clouds, peopled the enormous heavens with fantastic shapes of light which were thickest over the hills wherein was the Valley of Bones.

To my strained mind these clouds looked like battling armies, figures of flame warring against figures of darkness. The darkness won; no, the light broke out again and conquered it. And see, there above them both squatted a strange black presence crowned with fire. It might have been that of Zikali magnified ten thousand times, and hark! It laughed with the low reverberating voice of distant thunder.

Suddenly I felt that I was no longer alone and, looking 'round, saw Goza at my side.

"What do you see up there, Macumazahn, that you stare so hard?" he asked, pointing at the sky with his stick.

"Impis fighting," I answered briefly.

"Then you must be a 'heaven-doctor,' Macumazahn, for I only see black and red clouds. Well, it is time to go to learn whether or no the impis will fight, for Zikali waits us and the Council has started already. By the way, the king says that you will do well to put your pistol in your pocket in case any should seek to harm you in the dark."

"It is there. But, Goza, I pray you to protect me, since in the dark bullets fly wide, and if I began to shoot, one might hit *you*, Goza."

He smiled, making no answer, but I noticed that during the rest of that night he was careful to keep behind me as much as possible.

Our way led us through the town where everybody seemed to be standing about doing nothing and speaking very little. There was a curious air of expectancy upon their faces. They knew that the crisis was at hand, that their nation's fate hung upon the scales, and they watched my every look and movement as if in them they expected to read an omen.

I too watched them out of the corners of my eyes, wondering whether I should escape from their savage company alive. If once the blood lust broke out among them, it seemed to me that I should have about as much chance as a chopped fox among a pack of hungry hounds.

Once out of the town we saw no one until we came to the circle of guards which I have already mentioned, who stood there like an endless line of black statues. In answer to their challenge Goza gave some complicated password in which my name occurred, whereon they opened out and let us through. Then we marched on to the mouth of the kloof.

The place was very dark, for now the sun was down in the west and the moon in the east was cut off from us by the hills and would not be visible here for half an hour or more.

Presently I saw a spot of light. It was a small fire burning near the foot of the tongue of rock which I have described. At a distance, in front of the fire on the patch of prepared ground, squatted a number of men, between twenty and thirty of them, in a semi-circle. They were wrapped up in karosses and blankets, and in their center sat a large figure on a chair of wood.

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"The king and the Great Council," whispered Goza.

One of them looked 'round and saw us. At some sign from the king he rose, and against the fire I saw that he was the Prime Minister, Umnyamana. He came to me and, with a nod of recognition, conducted me some paces to the right where a euphorbia tree grew among the rank herbage. Here I found a stool placed ready on which I sat down, Goza, who of course was not of the Council, squatting at my side in the grass.

Now I found that I was so situated that I could not well be seen from the fire, or even the rock above it, while I, by moving my head a little, could see both quite clearly. After this as the last reflection from the sunk sun faded, the darkness increased until nothing remained visible except the fire and the massive outline of the rock behind.

The silence was complete, for none of the Council spoke. They were so still that they might have been dead, so still that a beetle suddenly booming past made me start as if it had been a bullet. The general impression was almost mesmeric. I felt as if I were going to sleep and yet my mind remained painfully awake, so that I was able to think things out.

I understood clearly that the body of men to my left had come together to decide whether there should be peace or war; that there were divisions of opinion among them; that the king was ready to follow the party which should prove itself the strongest, but that the real voice of decision would speak from behind that fire. It was the case of the Delphic Oracle over again with a priest instead of a priestess, and what a priest!

It was evident to me also that Zikali, who knew human nature and especially savage human nature, had arranged all this with a view to scenic and indeed supernatural effect. Moreover, he had done it very well, since I knew myself that in this place and hour words and occurrences would affect me deeply at which I should have laughed in the sunlight and open plain. Already the Zulus were affected, for I could hear the teeth of some of them chattering, and Goza began to shiver at my side. He muttered that it was cold and lied, for the donga was extremely hot and stuffy.

At length the silver radiance of the moon spread itself on the high curtain of the dark. Then the edge of her orb appeared above the hill and an arrow of white light fell into the little valley. It struck upon the rock and revealed a misshapen, white-headed figure, squatted between it and the fire, the figure of Zikali.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT COUNCIL

NONE had seen or heard him come, and though doubtless he had but crept 'round the rock and taken his place in the darkness, there appeared to be something mysterious about this sudden appearance of Zikali. So the Zulu nobles thought at any rate, for they uttered a low *Ow!* of fear and wonder.

There he sat like a huge ape, staring at the sky, for the firelight shone on his deep and burning eyes. The moonlight increased, but now and again it was broken by little clouds which caused strange shadows to appear about the rock. Some of these shadows looked as if veiled figures were approaching the wizard, bending over him and departing again, after giving him their message or counsel.

"His spirits visit him," whispered Goza, but I made no answer.

This went on for quite a long time, until the full round of the moon appeared above the hill indeed, and, for the while, the clouds had cleared away. Still Zikali sat silent, and I, who was acquainted with the habits of this people, knew that I was witnessing a conflict between two whom they considered to be respectively a spiritual and an earthly king.

It is my belief that unless he were first addressed, Zikali would have sat all night without opening his lips. Possibly Cetewayo would have done the same if the impatience of public opinion had allowed him. At any rate it was he who gave way.

"Makosi, master of many spirits, on behalf of the Council and the People of the Zulus I, the King, greet you here in the place that you have chosen," said Cetewayo, but Zikali made no answer.

The silence went on as before, till at length, after a pause and some whispering, he repeated his salutation, adding—

"Has age made you deaf, O Opener of Roads, that you can not hear the voice of the King?"

Then at last Zikali answered in his low

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voice that yet seemed to fill all the kloof:

"Nay, Child of Senzangacona, age has not made me deaf, but my spirit in these latter days floats far from my body. It is like a bladder filled with air that a child holds by a string, and before I can speak I must draw it from the heavens to earth again. What did you say about the place that I have chosen? Well, what better place could I choose, seeing that it was here in this very Vale of Bones that I met the first king of the Zulus, Chaka the wild beast, who was your uncle? Why then should I not choose it to meet the last king of the Zulus?"

Now I, listening, saw at once that this saying might be understood in two ways, namely that Cetewayo was the reigning king, or that he was the last king who would ever reign. But the Council interpreted it in the latter and worse sense, for I saw a quiver of fear go through them.

"Why should I not choose it," went on Zikali, "seeing also that this place is holy to me? Here it was, O Son of Panda, that Chaka brought my children to be killed and forced me, sitting where you sit, to watch their deaths. There on the rock above me they were killed, four of them, three sons and a daughter, and the slayers —they came to an evil end, those slayers, as did Chaka—laughed and cast them down from the rock before me. Yes, and Chaka laughed, and I too laughed, for had not the king the right to kill my children and to steal their mothers, and was I not glad that they should be taken from the world and gathered to that of spirits whence they always talk to me, yes, even now? That is why I did not hear you at first, King, because they were talking to me."

He paused, turning one ear upwards, then continued in a new and tender voice:

"What is it you say to me, Noma, my dear little Noma? Oh! I hear you, I hear you."

Now he shifted himself along the ground on his haunches some paces to the right, and began to search about, groping with his long fingers.

"Where, where?" he muttered. "Oh, I understand, further under the root, a jackal buried it, did it? Pah! How hard is this soil. Ah! I have it, but look, Noma, a stone has cut my finger. I have it, I have it," and from beneath the root of some fallen tree he drew out the skull of a child and, holding it in his right hand, softly rubbed the mold off it with his left.

"Yes, Noma, it might be yours, it is of the right size, but how can I be sure? What is it you say? The teeth? Ah—now I remember. Only the day before you were taken I pulled out that front tooth, did I not, and beneath it was another that was strangely split in two. If this skull was yours, it will be there. Come to the fire, Noma, and let us look; the moonlight is faint, is it not?"

Back to the fire he shifted himself, and, bending toward the blaze, made an examination.

"True, Noma, true! Here is the split tooth, white as when I saw it all those years ago. Oh, dear child of my body, dear child of my spirit, for we do not beget with the body alone, Noma, as you know better than I do today, I greet you," and pressing the skull to his lips, he kissed it, then set it down in front of him between himself and the fire with the face part pointing to the king, and burst into one of his eerie and terrible laughs.

A low moan went up from his audience, and I felt the skin of Goza, who had shrunk against me, break into a profuse sweat. Then suddenly Zikali's voice changed once more and became hard and business-like, if I may call it so, similar to that of other professional doctors.

"You have sent for me, O King, as those who went before you have sent when great things were about to happen. What is the matter on which you would speak to me?"

"You know well, Opener of Roads," answered Cetewayo, rather shakily I thought. "The matter is one of peace or war. The English threaten me and my people and make great demands on me; amongst others that the army should be disbanded. I can set them all out if you will. If I refuse to do as they bid me, then within a few days they will invade Zululand; indeed their soldiers are already gathered at the drifts."

"It is not needful, King," answered Zikali, "since I know what all know, neither more nor less. The winds whisper the demands of the white men, the birds sing them, the hyenas howl them at night. Let us see how the matter stands. When your father died, Sompseu, (Sir T. Shepstone), the great white chief, came from the English Government to name you king. This he could not do according to our law, since

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how can a stranger name the King of the Zulus? Therefore the Council of the Nation and the doctors—I was not among them, King—moved the spirit of Chaka the Lion into the body of Sompseu and made him as Chaka was and gave him power to name you to rule over the Zulus.

"So it came about that to the English Queen through the spirit of Chaka you swore certain things; that slaying for witchcraft should be abolished; that no man should die without fair and open trial, and other matters."

He paused a while, then went on—

"These oaths you have broken, O King, as being of the blood you are and what you are, you must do."

Here there was disturbance among the Council and Cetewayo half rose from his seat, then sat down again. Zikali, gazing at the sky, waited till it had died away, then went on:

"Do any question my words? If so, then let them ask of the white men whether they be true or no. Let them ask also of the spirits of those who have died for witchcraft, and of the spirits of the women who have been slain and whose bodies were laid at the cross-roads because they married the men they chose and not the soldiers to whom the king gave them."

"How can I ask the white men who are far away?" broke out Cetewayo, ignoring the rest.

"Are the white men so far away, King? It is true that I see none and hear none, yet I seem to smell one of them close at hand." Here he took up the skull which he had laid down and whispered to it. "Ah! I thank you, my child. It seems, King, that there is a white man here hidden in this kloof, he who is named Macumazahn, a good man and a truthful, known to many of us from of old, who can tell you what his people think, though he is not one of their *indunas*. If you question my words, ask him."

"We know what the white men think," said Cetewayo, "so there is no need to ask Macumazahn to sing us an old song. The question is—what must the Zulus do? Must they swallow their spears and, ceasing to be a nation, become servants, or must they strike with them and drive the English into the sea, and after them the Boers?"

"Tell me first, King, who dwell far away and alone, knowing little of what passes in the land of Life, what the Zulus desire to do. Before me sits the great Council of the Nation. Let it speak."

Then one by one the members of the Council uttered their opinions in order of rank or seniority. I do not remember the names of all who were present, or what each of them said. I recall, however, that Sigananda, a very old chief—he must have been over ninety —spoke the first.

He told them that he had been a friend of Chaka and one of his captains, and had fought in most of his battles. That afterwards he had been a general of Dingaan's until that king killed the Boers under Retief, when he left him and finally sided with Panda in the civil war in which Dingaan was killed with the help of the Boers. That he had been present at the battle of the Tugela, though he took no actual part in the fighting, and afterwards became a councillor of Panda's and then of Cetewayo his son. It was a long and interesting historical recital covering the whole period of the Zulu monarchy which ended suddenly with these words:

"I have noted, O King and Councillors, that whenever the black vulture of the Zulus was content to attack birds of his own feather, he has conquered. But when he has met the grey eagles of the white men, which come from over the sea, he has been conquered, and my heart tells me that as it has been in the past, so it shall be in the future. Chaka was a friend of the English, so was Panda, and so has Cetewayo been until this hour. I say, therefore, let not the King tear the hand which fed him because it seems weak, lest it should grow strong and clutch him by the throat and choke him."

Next spoke Undabuko, Dabulamanzi and Magwenga, brothers of the king, who all favored war, though the two last were guarded in their speech. After these came Uhamu, the king's uncle—he who was said to be the son of a spirit—who was strong for peace, urging that the king should submit to the demands of the English, making the best terms he could, that he "should bend like a reed before the storm, so that after the storm had swept by, he might stand up straight again, and with him all the other reeds of the people of the Zulus."

So, too, said Seketwayo, chief of the Umdhlalosi, and more whom I cannot recall, six or seven of them. But Usibebu

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and the *induna* Untshingwayo, who afterwards commanded at Isandhlwana, were for fighting, as were Sirayo, the husband of the two women who had been taken on English territory and killed, and Umbilini, the chief of Swazi blood whose surrender was demanded by Sir Bartle Frere and who afterwards commanded the Zulus in the battle at Ihlobane.

Last of all spoke the Prime Minister, Umnyamana, who declared fiercely that if the Zulu buffalo hid itself in the swamp like a timid calf when the white bull challenged it on the hills, the spirits of Chaka and all his forefathers would thrust its head into the mud and choke it.

WHEN all had finished Cetewayo spoke, saying:

"That is a bad council which has two voices, for to which of them must the Captain listen when the impis of the foe gather in front of him? Here I have sat while the moon climbs high and counted, and what do I find? That one half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say yes, and that the other half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say no. Which then is it to be, yes or no? Are we to fight the English, or are we to sit still?"

"That is for the king to decide," said a voice.

"See what it is to be a king," went on Cetewayo with passion. "If I declare for war and we win, shall I be greater than I am? If victory gives me more land, more subjects, more wives and more cattle, what is the use of these things to me who already have enough of all of them? And if defeat should take everything from me, even my life perhaps, then what shall I have gained? I will tell you—the curse of the Zulus upon my name from father to son for ever. They will say, 'Cetewayo, son of Panda, pulled down a House that once was great. Because of some small matter he quarrelled with the English who were always the friends of our people, and brought the Zulus to the dust.' Sintwangu, my messenger, who brought heavy words from the Queen's *induna* which we must answer with other words or with spears, says that the English soldiers in Natal are few, so few that we Zulus can swallow them like bits of meat and still be hungry. But are these all the soldiers of the English? I am not sure.

"You are one of that people, Macumazahn," he added, turning his massive shape towards me, "tell us now, how many soldiers has your Queen?"

"King," I answered, "I do not know for certain. But if the Zulus can muster fifty thousand spears, the Queen, if there be need, can send against them ten times fifty thousand, and if she grows angry, another ten times fifty, every one armed with a rifle that will fire five bullets a minute, and to accompany the soldiers, hundreds of cannon whereof a single shot would give Ulundi to the flames. Out of the sea they will come, shipload after shipload, white men from where the sun sets and black men from where the sun rises, so many that Zululand would not hold them."

Now at these words, which I delivered as grandly as I could, something like a groan burst from the Council, though one man cried—

"Do not listen to the white traitor, O King, who is sent here to turn our hearts to water with his lies."

"Macumazahn may lie to us," went on Cetewayo, "though in the past none in the land have ever known him to lie, but he was not sent to do so, for I brought him here. For my part I do not believe that he lies. I believe that these English are as many as the pebbles in a river bed, and that to them Natal, yes, and all the Cape, is but as a single, outlying cattle kraal, one cattle kraal out of a hundred. Did not Sompseu once tell us that they were countless, on that day when he came many years ago after the battle of the Tugela to name me to succeed my father Panda, the day when my faction, the Usutu, roared 'round him for hours like a river in flood, and he sat still like a rock in the centre of a river?

"Also, I am minded of the words that Chaka said when Dingaan and Umbopa had stabbed him and he lay dying at the kraal of Duguza, that although the dogs of his own House whom his hand fed, had eaten him up, he heard the sound of the running of the feet of a great white people that should stamp them and the Zulus flat."

He paused, and the silence was so intense that the crackling of Zikali's fire, which kept on burning brightly although I saw no fuel added to it, sounded quite loud. Presently it was broken, first by a dog near at hand, howling horribly at the moon, and

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next by the hooting of a great owl that flitted across the donga, the shadow of its wide wings falling for a moment on the king.

"Listen!" exclaimed Cetewayo. "A dog that howls! Methinks that it stands upon the roof of the House of Senzangacona. And an owl that hoots. Methinks that owl has its nest in the world of spirits! Are these good omens, Councillors? I trow not. I say that I will not decide this matter of peace or war. If there is one of my own blood here who will do so, come, let him take my place and let me go away to my own lordship of Gikazi that I had when I was a prince before the witch Mameena who played with all men and loved but one—" here everybody turned and stared toward me, yes, even Zikali whom nothing else had seemed to move, till I wished that the ground would swallow me up—"caused the war between me and my brother Umbelazi whose blood earth will not swallow nor suns dry——"

"How can that be, O King?" broke in Umnyamana, the Prime Minister. "How can any of your race sit in your seat while you still live? Then indeed there would be war, war between tribe and tribe and Zulu and Zulu till none were left, and the white hyenas from Natal would come and chew our bones and with them the Boers that have passed the Vaal. See now. Why is this *Nyanga* (witch-doctor) here?" and he pointed to Zikali beyond the fire. "Why has the Opener of Roads been brought from the Black Kloof which he has not left for years? Is it not that he may give us counsel in our need and show us a sign that his counsel is good, whether it be for war or peace? Then when he has made divination and given the counsel and shown the sign, then, O King, do you speak the word of war or peace, and send it to the Queen by yonder white man, and by that word we, the people, will abide."

At this suggestion, which I had no doubt was made by some secret agreement between Umnyamana and Zikali, Cetewayo seemed to grasp. Perhaps this was because it postponed for a little while the dreadful moment of decision, or perhaps because he hoped that in the eyes of the nation it would shift the responsibility from his shoulders to those of the spirits, speaking through the lips of their prophet. At any rate he nodded and answered:

"It is so. Let the Opener of Roads open us a road through the forests and the swamps and the rocks of doubt, danger and fear. Let him give us a sign that it is a good road on which we may safely travel, and let him tell us whether I shall live to walk that road and what I shall meet thereon. I promise him in return the greatest fee that ever yet was paid to a doctor in Zululand."

Now Zikali lifted his big head, shook his grey locks, and opening his wide mouth, as if he expected manna to fall into it from the sky, he laughed out loud.

"O-ho-ho," he laughed. "Oho-ho-ho-o, it is worth while to have lived so long when life has brought me to such an hour as this. What is it that my ears hear? That I, the Indwande dwarf, I whom Chaka named The-Thing-that-never-should-have-b e e n-born, I, one of the race conquered and despised by the Zulus, am here to speak a word which the Zulus dare not utter, which the King of the Zulus dares not utter. O-ho-ho-ho.

"And what does the King offer to me? A fee, a great fee for the word that shall paint the Zulus red with blood or white with the slime of shame. Nay, I take no fee that is the price of blood or shame. Before I speak that word unknown—for as yet my heart has not heard it, and what the heart has not heard the lips cannot shape—I ask but one thing. It is an oath, that whatever follows on the word, while there is a Zulu left living in the world, I, the Voice of the Spirits, shall be safe from hurt or from reproach, I and those of my House and those over whom I throw my blanket, be they black or be they white. That is my fee, without which I am silent."

"*Izwa!* We hear you. We swear it on behalf of the people," said every councillor in the semi-circle in front of him; yes, and the king said it also, stretching out his hand.

"Good," said Zikali, "it is an oath, it is an oath, sworn here upon the bones of the dead. Evil-doers you call them, but I say to you that many of those who sit before me have more evil in their hearts than had those dead. Well, let it be proclaimed, O King, and with it this—that ill shall it go with him who breaks the oath, with his family, with his kraal and all with whom he has to do.

"Now what is it you ask of me? First of all, counsel as to whether you should

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fight the English Queen, a matter on which you, the great ones, are evenly divided in opinion, as is the nation behind you. O King, *Indunas*, and Captains, who am I that I should judge of such a matter which is beyond my trade, a matter of the world above and of men's bodies, not of the world below of men's spirits? Yet there was one who made the Zulu people out of nothing, as a potter fashions a vessel from clay, as a smith fashions an assegai out of the ore of the hills, yes, and tempers it with human blood. Chaka the Lion, the Wild Beast, the King among Kings, the Conqueror, I knew Chaka as I knew his father, yes, and his father. Others still living knew him also, say you, Sigananda there for instance," and he pointed to the old chief who had spoken first. "Yes, Sigananda knew him as a boy knows a great man, as a soldier knows a general. But I knew his heart, aye, I shaped his heart, I was its thought. Had it not been for me he would never have been great. Then he wronged me—" here he took up the skull which he said was that of his daughter and stroked it—"and I left him.

"He was not wise, he should have killed one whom he had wronged, but perhaps he knew that I could not be killed; perhaps he had tried and found that he was but throwing spears at the moon which fell back on his own head. I forget. It is so long ago, and what does it matter? At least I took away from him the prop of my wisdom, and he fell—to rise no more.

"And so it has been with others. So it has been with others. Yet while he was great I knew his heart who lived in his heart, and therefore I ask myself, had he been sitting where the king sits today, what would Chaka have done? I will tell you. If not only the English but the Boers also and with them the Pandas, the Basutos and all the tribes of Africa had threatened him, he would have fought them—yes, and set his heel upon their necks. Therefore, although I give no counsel upon such a matter, I say to you that the counsel of Chaka is—fight—and conquer. Hearken to it or pass it by—I care not which."

He paused and a loud "*Ow*" of wonder and admiration rose from his audience. Myself I nearly joined in it, for I thought this one of the cleverest bits of statecraft that ever I had heard of or seen.

The old wizard had taken no responsibility and given no answer to the demand for advice. All this he had thrust on to the shoulders of a dead man, and that man one whose name was magical to every Zulu, the king whose memory they adored, the great General who had gorged them with victory and power. Speaking as Chaka, after a long period of peace, he urged them once more to lift their spears and know the joys of triumph, thereby making themselves the greatest nation in Southern Africa.

From the moment I heard this cunning appeal, I knew what the end would be; all the rest was but of minor and semi-personal interest. I knew also for the first time how truly great was Zikali and wondered what he might have become had Fortune set him in different circumstances among a civilized people.

Now he was speaking again, and quickly, before the impression died away.

"Such is the word of Chaka spoken by me who was his secret councillor, the Councillor who was seldom seen, and never heard. Does not Sigananda yonder know the voice which amongst all those present echoes in his ears alone?"

"I know it," cried the old chief.

Then with his eyes starting almost from his head, Sigananda leapt up and, raising his hand, gave the royal salute, the Bayéte to the spirit of Chaka, as if the dead king stood before him.

I think that most of those there thought that it did stand before him, for some of them also gave the Bayéte, and even Cetewayo raised his arm.

Sigananda squatted down again and Zikali went on.

"You have heard. This captain of the Lion knows his voice. So, that is done with. Now you ask of me something else—that I who am a doctor, the oldest of all the doctors and, it is thought—I know not—the wisest, should be able to answer. You ask of me—How shall this war prosper, if it is made—and what shall chance to the King during and after the war, and lastly you ask of me a sign. What I tell to you is true, is it not so?"

"It is true," answered the Council.

"Asking is easy," continued Zikali in a grumbling voice, "but answering is another matter. How can I answer without preparation, without the needful medicines also that I have not with me, who did not know

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what would be sought of me, who thought that my opinion was desired and no more? Go away now and return on the sixth night and I will tell you what I can do."

"Not so," cried the king. "We refuse to go, for the matter is immediate. Speak at once, Opener of Roads, lest it should be said in the land that after all you are but an ancient cheat, a stick that snaps in two when it is leaned on."

"Ancient cheat! I remember that is what Macumazahn yonder once told I am, though afterwards— Perhaps he was right, for who in his heart knows whether or not he be a cheat, a cheat who deceives himself and through himself others. A stick that snaps in two when it is leaned on! Some have thought me so and some have thought otherwise. Well, you would have answers which I know not how to give, being without medicine and in face of those who are quite ignorant and therefore cannot lend me their thoughts, as it sometimes happens that men do when workers of evil are sought out in the common fashion. For then, as you may have guessed, it is the evil-doer who himself tells the doctor of his crime, though he may not know that he is telling it. Yet there is another stone that I alone can throw, another plan that I alone can practise, and that not always. But of this I would not make use since it is terrible and might frighten you or even send you back to your huts raving so that your wives, yes, and the very dogs, fled from you."

He stopped and for the first time did something to his fire, for I saw his hands going backward and forward, as if he warmed them at the flames.

At length an awed voice, I think it was that of Dabulamanzi, asked:

"What is this plan, *Inyanga?* Let us hear that we may judge."

"The plan of calling one from the dead and hearkening to the voice of the dead. Is it your desire that I should draw water from this fount of wisdom, O King and Councillors?"

TO BE CONTINUED

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

By A. JUDSON HANNA

SOMEWHERE in France
Light-hearted lads are singing,
Brave voices, bugle clear against the dawn.
Youth will be gay, despite the mortars, flinging
Their shotted death, and battle-fires far drawn,
Somewhere in France.

Somewhere in France
The bayonets are streaming
Up from the trenches to a wild, strange cry,
As rank on rank, beneath the star-shell's gleaming,
The tight-lipped lads plunge proudly on to die,
Somewhere in France.

Somewhere in France,
Crowding the green-spread valley—
Ah, pitying Christ, the countless little mounds!
The youth of twenty nations make that tally—
Dear little hills that hide a soldier's wounds,
Somewhere in France!

Somewhere in France,
With that heroic number,
He lies, beneath the singing chestnut boughs.
God keep his hillock green, and soothe his slumber!
But ah! Never to know that earth-sealed house,
Somewhere in France!

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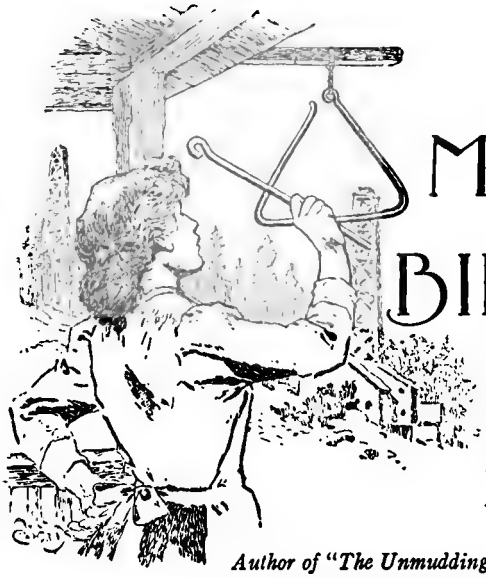

AT THE MERCY OF BILL GUNN

by Douglass Watson

Author of "The Unmudding of the Empire."

OF THE past are the thoughts of increasing years. Youth thinks of the day, or days to come, of that uncharted sea of inexperience wherein lie happy isles girt with sapphire, emeralds strewn upon a placid, cloudless deep. There the full measure of life awaits; there sorrows beckon in the guise of joys.

Mrs. Vernon thought of the past: there was a day when she and her Kitty did not preside over a crude, makeshift oil-field cook-house, from whose rough exterior the whitewash peeled in great thick flakes.

Sickness, and the receding waves of boom days, had wrought the change. Fate? She had shrugged with well-bred dignity at the suggestion, and, with the pluck of pioneers, Kitty and she had taken over the Hibernian Oil Company's commissary to fill the 'ginger jar'—to keep the family craft afloat through the financial shallows.

She stood, thinking, as she wiped her hands upon her blue gingham apron; the last platter of smoking food had been placed upon the long oilcloth-covered table that crowded the narrow room.

With a housewifely glance, a final approving survey, she turned and walked to the kitchen door, looking toward the back porch where Kitty, leaning against a wooden support, a short iron rod in her hand, awaited her mother's signal.

A sigh had escaped the girl's slightly parted lips. With a quick toss, she had shaken back her tangle of ruddy, golden hair. Her thoughts? They were those of a laughing, carefree, yet earnest, girl of twenty; thoughts that had brought forth a wistful, dreamy smile, for they were woven about a big, broad-shouldered viking of a man, four years her senior, whose clear blue eyes had thus far sought in vain for an answer in hers—and big, soft, round, brown eyes they were—unfathomable.

Who had given him the right to be jealous? Not she. He had been hardy enough to task her with flirting! The idea! She frowned, and then the frown melted. From beneath her dark brows she looked out over the derrick-dotted hills with a dancing twinkle. After all, Steve was . . .

"All ready, Kitty," called Mrs. Vernon, and mechanically the girl's hand moved.

The metallic pulsings from the vigorously struck triangle surged through the midday silence; the daylight tower (shift) was summoned to its noon meal. The welcome sound roused the groups of waiting men to concerted action; laughing and talking, they shuffled noisily over the uneven porch flooring to file through the swinging screen-doors.

But Stephen Kendall sat gloomily alone on the front steps, thinking. As the others moved off, he stretched to his full height

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and shuddered. His gaze drifted out over the forest of derricks to the willow-bordered river for an instant; then, with an impatient shrug, he stepped back from the dazzling sunlight and followed his fellows indoors.

In the dining-room's subdued light his eyes sought Kitty, but, as she came and went from the kitchen, she avoided his glance and ignored his presence. Wearily he sank into his place, silent, preoccupied; then almost feverishly, as if to drown his chagrin, he plunged into the general conversation with but a sorry counterfeit of his usual good humor and raillery.

The meal ended; one by one the men left the table, until he was alone. Should he try a ruse? He grinned at his hastily planned ambuscade, when he called aloud—

"Kitty, I'd like another cup of coffee!"

Her face was scarlet as she came to take the thick, heavy cup from him.

"Oh, Kitty," he pleaded, his free hand seeking to touch hers as she drew back, "won't you listen to me? I don't want coffee any more than a cat wants two tails. I just want to talk to you. I want to tell you what an awful rough-neck I am to get touchy just because Bill Gunn called on you last night. I was crazy, I guess, when I spoke this morning. I haven't the right to kick. But, you'll forget it, won't you?"

She arched her brows and shook her head uncertainly. There was the barest suggestion of a smile upon her lips; her eyes seemed to acquiesce though her manner was distant and reserved.

"We've got to get ready for the other tower, Kitty," Mrs. Vernon called pleasantly from the kitchen.

Steve started guiltily.

"I didn't realize it was so late," he stammered. "Bill Gunn will be madder than a hatter if I don't relieve him on the dot."

He started to leave, but at the door he halted and turned.

"Would you come over to the derrick when you're through, Kitty? I've got a lot to tell you," he said earnestly. "We can talk while George Williams, my tool-dresser, is busy at something outside the rig. If you come, I'll know you forgive me," he ventured. "Will you?"

"Maybe—maybe not," she evaded with a provoking laugh, and Steve swung from the room, tantalized yet hopeful, to make his belated way along the white, dusty road to the drilling well, where his arrival was already awaited with impatience.

"WHERE in ——'s Steve Kendall?" was Bill Gunn's grumbled greeting as Williams entered the derrick.

The bailer shot from the open hole and hung, spinning and dripping slightly, over the wooden floor of the rig.

"He's always late," Gunn growled, jabbing his hand angrily into the jockey-box to tear off a bit of waste to wipe the grime from his greasy fingers. "He seems to think fellows working against him on tower never get hungry."

A large monkey-wrench lay on the floor at his feet. While speaking, he kicked it viciously, sending it skipping across the boards toward the yawning well. The three men in the derrick listened: seconds passed before a dull, squudgy impact came from the bottom of the oil well, begun but two days before.

"Doesn't take long to travel a hundred and ninety feet when you're going down, eh?" Williams remarked with cynical dryness. "That sure was a fine thing to do, dropping that tool into the hole, Bill Gunn! Say, we'll never get it out. We'll have to drill the blame thing up."

Unnoticed, Kendall's towering form loomed in the doorway. He had caught but a hazy suggestion of the conversation. He stepped forward quietly, his curiosity aroused.

"What's that? Drill what up?" he demanded abruptly, looking from Williams to Gunn, and then to Kerr, Gunn's tool-dresser, for information.

"Oh, I kicked a wrench over the floor and it fell in, that's all," was Gunn's casual explanation. Then, he added, with attempted sarcasm, "Did you enjoy your banquet, *Mr.* Kendall?"

Steve faced him with a look of irritated forbearance, and shrugged. He turned to Williams.

"Here, George, pass me the mirror," and while he waited he spoke to Gunn: "Sorry, Bill, I was late. I'll make it up to you some time."

Through the opening in the derrick roof, the hot June sun poured a golden stream, slashing the darkened interior of the rig with its blade of light, throwing the two nearly equal parts of the structure into twilight gloom by comparison.

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Steve took the mirror from his tool-dresser, swung into the sunshine, and, deftly catching the bright rays with the glass, threw the searching radiance into the somber hole. Every child has plagued his fellows, often his elders, with the same device —a bit of looking-glass reflecting dazzling light, blinding his object's eyes. Here, the beam illuminated a night-black hole, lighting its every foot, much as would the mirror's flash make visible the details of a long, dark corridor.

Standing at the well-head, Steve could see the wrench resting on the sandy bottom far below him.

"Hump!" he exclaimed. "Why, this hole's a regular mine shaft! You sure got it big enough, Bill. I'll bet I can pick up the danged tool if you'll let me down on the sand-line." There was a healthy bravado in his confident assertion.

"Listen to Steve's big talk, boys! He hasn't got the nerve to do it, and he knows it," slurred Gunn with a sniff of contempt.

"I haven't, eh?"

"No, you haven't!" was the malicious challenge.

The two drillers glared at each other—Gunn, short, powerful, swarthy, looking out upon the world through sharp, rodent-like eyes; Kendall, tall, lithe, fair, his steady blue eyes adding frankness to his pleasing countenance. The one repelled; the other attracted. One would have said a Sicilian and a Norseman, for each was the other's antithesis.

"Well, we'll see if I haven't," Steve said with measured tranquillity, and a solemn, decisive nod. "Undo that bailer, George! Make a loop in the line for my foot. I'm going after that wrench, understand? And, Bill Gunn, you can't imply that I'm a coward, and get away with it." He pointed a warning finger at him. "You're going to stay right here and see this through. Never mind about your dinner—that can wait. Tell me about the well; has she caved much?"

"No," lied Gunn calmly. He signaled a caution to Kerr. "You don't think she's caved much, do you, Jim?"

"Only near the bottom," the tool-dresser admitted with begrudging truth, awed by his superior's timely scowl.

"Aw ——! That was nothing. We bailed that out. She's as dry as a bone. Why, a lady in patent-leathers could walk around down there without getting her shoes dirty. If you want to go down, Steve, don't let Kerr scare you," Gunn remarked slightingly.

"Same time, I wouldn't chance it, Steve," urged Kerr timidly.

"Ha! Now, watch the mighty Steve crawl. Now he's got an excuse. I'll bet any man here five dollars he doesn't do it," Gunn laughed gratingly.

"When I crawl, Bill Gunn, your belly'll scrape the ground," Steve flung at him with a mixture of defiance and banter.

"Oh, it will, will it?" sneered the other. "Say, if you're going to do your little stunt to-day, just wiggle a bit. I don't want to stay here jawing forever. Neither Mrs. Vernon nor her daughter likes to be kept waiting, see? I know. I was late meeting Kitty last night. She didn't like it a little bit."

Steve paled. His lips parted from gritted teeth as he glanced at the speaker. On the point of loosing his anger in a wordy torrent, he caught himself and dammed the impetuous flood that would have betrayed his brutal thoughts. Hurriedly he bent down to hide his emotion, under the pretense of helping Williams arrange the loop in the line.

Gunn moved leisurely to the derrick door, shrugging as he went, and stood there watching the lazy steam-plumes rising from the pumping wells, as each stroke brought the glistening black oil from the hidden sands and spurted it into the sumps.

Vibrant sunshine streamed from the cloudless sky. The still air sparkled. Pools of petroleum, filling the cup-like hollows in the hills, reflected the intense blue above, their unruffled surfaces mirroring faultlessly the surrounding derricks and ramshackle houses. An oily redolence was everywhere.

"So help me Bob, if here isn't little Miss Redtop coming up the road now!" exclaimed Gunn with surprise. He cast a cynical, offensive smile over his shoulder at the man behind him. "Coming to find out why I'm late, Kitty?" he called to her, but watching Kendall from the corner of his eye for any change of expression his words might produce.

"Look here, Bill Gunn, you leave Kitty Vernon out of your conversation! Understand?" Steve towered to his height. There was even a menace in his attitude. "Just leave her out!"

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"S—o?" drawled the man at the door. He swung about. "And since when have you had the right to say who should talk to Kitty Vernon, I'd like to know?"

"Sure you would. And you will—someday," Steve heckled. "But, never mind now," he continued, retreating behind a shield of assumed indifference, for Gunn's black look presaged conflict. "If you're going to let me down this well, we don't want a fight on our hands. We can do that any old time. Pull up the slack; I want to test this loop."

As Gunn backed from the door his thoughts were of the girl toiling up the road. So Steve Kendall was the cause of the curt refusal she had given him the night before. Well, she might think differently if Steve were out of the way; a slip against the well's caving side would end it. Nobody would ever guess how it happened, much less point an accusing finger at him. He could stop the line just at the cave. Steve would swing to and fro, the dry sand would run, and then he would drop him five or six feet to the bottom. It would all be the work of a moment. With cunning, ratty eyes, Gunn turned.

"Ready, Steve?" he demanded eagerly.

His right hand gripped the sand-reel lever, the other turned the wheel controlling the throttle. The engine wheezed, coughed, spat, and started. The line became taut, and Steve, with right foot resting in the loop, and left hand clutching the sand-line high above his head, was raised from the floor. Like the weight on a huge pendulum, he swung slowly over the treacherous pit.

"Got a string on the line showing the exact depth, Bill?"

Gunn nodded a sullen answer.

"Good. Now, don't stop with a jerk, you understand? And, let me down fast. I don't want to scrape the sides. Let the cat die; wait till she stops swinging. Then, when I say the word, lower away. We don't want to make a slip, do we, Bill?"

"I should say not!" decided the man at the lever, shaking his head meaningly.

Williams held the mirror in his hands, and stood with Kerr at the well-head.

"Steady with that light, George," Steve cautioned. "Keep it on me all the time. Don't let your hands shake. Remember, the slightest tremor, the least shifting, throws you off your target, and that's me this time. Steady now, old man; I want to travel by daylight."

And, as Williams nodded, Kitty entered the derrick.

She stopped, and stood motionless, silhouetted against the gleaming sky, her hands clutching the door-frame for support, while her eyes accustomed themselves to the darkened interior. Her sunbonnet had fallen back upon her shoulders, and a vagrant sunbeam, filtering through a cranny in the boarding, danced with glints of deep red gold in her abundant hair.

There was a charming simplicity about her dress, about her attitude. Her unconscious beauty, her clear skin, her well-modeled features made Steve's heart beat fast with the desire for possession. He gave her an adoring look.

"W-h-a-t are you going to do?" she gasped, the flush of happiness ebbing from her cheeks.

She glanced timorously from one to another, seemingly prescient that the unusual was about to happen.

"Just let Steve down the hole after a wrench, that's all," Gunn volunteered with a leer.

The girl started, caught her breath. Her head went back in a gesture of shocked surprise.

"You're not going to do that, Steve?" she begged, shuffling forward unsteadily, dazed and frightened.

"That's what I am, Kitty," was his decisive answer, but a smile and a shrug softened its positiveness.

"No, no! You mustn't! You mustn't! It's dangerous! Isn't it, George? Isn't it, Jim?" Her voice was suddenly hoarse; it quavered. She ignored Gunn completely.

"I told him not to try it," Kerr broke in earnestly.

"Oh, it's nothing," Gunn remarked callously, waving a deprecating hand. "Steve would do it, and there you are."

The man swinging on the line shot him a savage glance that was acknowledged by a scornful raising of the shoulders, and a back insolently turned.

Kitty's face blanched. Her chin trembled, and she bit her lip, for she felt intuitively that Steve was at the mercy of Bill Gunn.

"Don't! Please! For my sake!" she faltered in a throaty whisper.

"I was willing to bet five dollars the

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mighty Steve'd quit if he had an excuse," insinuated Gunn instantly. "He boasted, and we took him up, that's the whole story."

"He did not; and George and I told him it was a crazy thing to do," Kerr protested with unusual warmth. "We never urged him, really we didn't, Kitty."

"I said I'd get that wrench, Kitty," Steve explained in a level, intense voice. "Maybe it was foolish, but I said it, and I don't mean to let any man, much less Bill Gunn, say I'm a crawler and a coward."

"Nobody could think you a coward, Steve." Her halting words stumbled through trembling lips.

"Oh, couldn't they?" interposed Gunn quickly, for he thought he saw a wave of irresolution sweep over Kendall's set, white face.

Steve closed his eyes. His features froze with determination.

"For — my — sake?" Kitty sobbed, stretching out her clenching hands in tearful appeal.

"Ready?" Gunn demanded gruffly.

Steve looked at him, intentionally avoiding the girl's prayerful gaze, as he answered with a barely articulate—

"Yes, I'm ready."

The arm on the lever relaxed, and Kendall's body plunged down the gaping hole with the suddenness of a man dropping through a gallows trap.

WILLIAMS, the mirror grasped tightly in his hands, bent over the well, following the descending figure with the sun's reflected light.

Gunn's eyes narrowed; immediately the driller in him was uppermost. He watched the racing line with hawk-like intensity, noting each twenty-foot string that flashed by, calculating the depth of the burden shooting downward. His every motion was exact, mechanically perfect. Above the whirring of the spinning sand-reel, he heard a shriek, a woman's anguished cry, but he kept his gaze centered on the line.

One hundred and fifty feet had been paid out. Forty more, and Kendall would hit bottom. He must stop without a jerk. His right hand tightened. He threw his weight upon the lever; the momentum slackened. Ten more feet and he would bring the line to a stop, and Kendall would swing against the caving wall.

Into Gunn's blurred, unconscious vision drifted the picture of Kerr supporting Kitty's fainting figure somewhere out there in the shadowy space before him—he dared not look.

"Don't stop me here! Lower! Lower! I'm scraping that caving side, I tell you!" bellowed the terror-stricken voice from the well, muffled and incoherent.

Sweat streamed from Williams's brow.

"Drop him, man! For God's sake, drop him! He's five feet off bottom. Let him get that wrench, then pull him up like lightning!" he roared in a frenzy, his eyes burning through the chalky whiteness of his frightened face.

In the crisis the light from the mirror failed; for Williams, forgetful for the instant, shook his hands wrathfully at the man at the throttle. The well was plunged into blinding darkness.

"That light! That light! I can't see!" boomed quavering from the depths.

The cry roused the moaning girl. She wrenched herself from Kerr's supporting arms; dashed the tears from her harrowed face; stumbled forward; and peered down the well as Williams flooded it again with light.

"Down, I tell you!" Williams yelled furiously. "God, man, that sand's trickling! Drop him!"

With deadly slowness the last five feet of line wormed from the reel. Kitty, fearful, anxious, hoping, watched. She stood between the two panting men at the well's verge. They saw Steve stoop and grasp the wrench with his free hand.

"He's got it! He's got it!" The girl's voice rang with exultant pride.

"He's straightening! Shall we pull up, Steve?" Williams demanded breathlessly.

But the answer was drowned by a sickening rumble of caving sand. An avalanche of glistening particles had dropped to the bottom of the hole.

With the irresistible sweep of a tidal wave, the granular flood tumbled and dashed over Kendall's body, gripping him fast within its crushing, lethal embrace. Higher and higher rose the stifling tide. Only the man's head and his high-raised left arm remained unburied; and he found himself tightly wedged between the sides of the well by the crunching envelope that swathed like a sable shroud.

In a thrill of terror, the hideous possibilities of his situation coursed through his

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throbbing head. Buried alive! Ugh! He bit his lip at the thought. The blood came as he fought with the monster of fear that hugged him in a death-grip. His reeling brain pictured the grisly struggle for breath that must come, should that hellish sand run again.

He tried to move, but his body was paralyzed into inaction by the torturing mass that held him in its gritty vise. And then day after day of his life since childhood flickered upon the screen of his memory, every detail distinct, every thought, every action, good or bad, magnified and distorted.

And then came Kitty. He seemed to forget himself; he seemed unreal, a thing without form or feeling, while she was a dream-creature, a wraith. She belonged to another existence; far, far back in the darkly hidden past.

He strove to recall her features, the sound of her voice. It was useless. Then the acrid taste of blood in his bleeding mouth made him shudder.

He looked about him. There was his glistening enemy, glaring at him with its million gleaming, frightful eyes. It surrounded him on every side: it pressed down upon his heart and lungs with savage glee. Ugh! Buried alive!

A despairing, strangled grunt groaned from the well.

"God!" Steve gasped in pain.

The hearts of the three watchers jumped, then stood still. They could hear him battling for breath.

"Don't—pull!" he panted. "She'll—cave—and—I'll be buried—alive! That light! Quick! That—light! I—won't—die in the dark!"

Williams braced himself with iron effort. He stilled his shaking hands, and the dazzling ray steadied.

Kitty moaned; she felt so helpless, so inadequate. Her reddened eyes refused to obey her will; they stared in fascination at the unhidden agony in Steve's face. Black lines of clutching fear seared it deeply. His pleading eyes, raised in mute appeal, struck terror to her heart, a heart already sick with futile longing.

The beam of searching light revealed the haunting horror that seized the imprisoned man. A shadow clothed his blood-stained chin, a shadow falling from his upraised hand; his brow was wet with clammy sweat.

Kitty crumpled to her knees; her nails dug the flesh of her fevered palms. A dumbing, palpitating silence hovered over all. Dust motes fluttered aimlessly in the golden stream the June sun poured into the chilling gloom.

To the girl's dimming vision, the outlines of the rude derrick faded. Lofty cathedral arches formed above her, and she pleaded with straining hands as there rose before her another agony-drawn face, lit by another glory-burst.

Williams, stoically helpless, Steve's patiently loyal guardian of light stood over her.

With stealthy shuffle, Gunn came near. With eyes that started from their sockets, he peered into the hole.

"God!" he whined, burying his face in his bent arm, as he recoiled, dwarfed and trembling.

Kitty tore her gaze from the ghastly tragedy below and stared at him. His features were bluish. His teeth chattered. Guilt, indelible guilt, was stamped upon his contorted face.

"You murderer!" she cried savagely, her accusing finger marking the flinching man. "You knew it would cave!"

She sprang at him in a fury, the fury of a wounded wild creature ready to sacrifice her life for her mate, her maddened eyes flashing rage. Unsteadily she lurched forward, choking with overmastering hate. Then, with a strangling sob, she covered her death-white face and slumped wearily against the derrick wall, hiding her aching head in her convulsing arms.

"Oh, what can I do? What can I do?" she moaned, her piteous cries wrenching her body—they seemed to come from the very depths of her being.

In a panic, Kerr ran from the rig. He tore down the road, shouting wildly:

"Kendall's buried alive! Kendall's buried alive!"

Kitty winced. The words cut like the thong of a knout.

Williams faithfully stood his post. Unflinchingly, he kept his eyes and the mirror's flash upon his imprisoned friend. He saw Steve loosen his left hand from the line and slowly, painfully, thrust back the sand from about his heart and breast. A gleam of hopefulness fluttered in the face of the buried man; he breathed easier.

"She's stopped running," he whispered, as if he feared his words might waken the

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stilled sand-streams to life. "I don't dare to have the rope jerk me loose—she might cave."

A strange calmness had crept into his voice. The terror of the first shock had passed, and, with its passing, Steve had regained somewhat of his assertive mastery.

"The air's awful bad down here. If I'm going to get out, I've got to do it right now. Every minute'll make it worse. Draw up the slack. We'll chance that, anyway. And listen, George!"

The even, quiet tones startled the girl. Her arms dropped to her sides; she straightened to an attitude of alert attention. She flew to the well, impelled by the magnetic influence of what she heard.

"Yes, yes! What is it, Steve?" she called entreatingly, disregarding the breathless arrival of the crews from neighboring rigs, drawn thither by Kerr's shouted warning.

Eagerly she bent over to catch the words coming from below, motioning to those about to maintain silence.

"Get a big can, like—a five-pound coffee-can will do. Make loops of wire about it. Fasten it to the sand-line. Attach a small rope to it. Then lower it to me. I'll fill it with my free hand. I'll dig myself out. Then we'll take a pull on the line."

"Good, good, Steve! That's it! We'll do it!"

She turned excitedly to the circle of men. Her explanation of the plan was punctuated with: "That'll do the trick!" "Beats lowering the tools with rope-slings attached." "Slow, but sure."

"Quick! Quick! Fly, one of you. Back to the cook-house as fast as you can. His life depends on it! Hurry! Oh, hurry! Get two of them. Quick! Quick!" she begged, wringing her hands, and edging forward as if to force the youthful volunteer to exert his utmost effort.

Even after the man's return, the laggard minutes grudgingly gave way to one another. Time lost its fleetness. To the impatient watchers, the ready, deft hands, arranging the device in accordance with Steve's suggestion, were aggravatingly slothful though their nimble fingers worked feverishly.

WHILE the preparations went forward, Gunn held himself aloof in a darkened corner. His shifting gaze circled about Kitty as she stood, quivering with expectancy at the well-head, calling down words of encouragement to Steve.

At last the work of rescue began. Time after time the can made the journey from the bottom; with each trip the burden upon the buried man was lightened; each trip the can-load became smaller.

Once it came up—empty.

"All in," Steve said thickly. "The air is bad—bad!" His weakened voice trailed off in a hollow, sepulchral whisper.

With wild eyes the men in the derrick glanced at each other, appalled, hushed by the imminent catastrophe. With one accord they neared the hole.

Gunn roused himself from his torpor and crept to Kitty's side. He spoke tremblingly, craning forward so that she alone might hear.

"Maybe I can pull him free. Won't you let me try?" he asked.

The girl gave him a terrified, shuddering look. She shrank from his touch with a gasp as the nightmare hideousness of his presence repelled her, and flew despairingly to the sand-reel lever and throttle, standing protectingly, combatively, over them. Her one thought being to keep Gunn from doing what, she felt, would result in Steve's certain death.

Gunn sprang after her.

"I know how you feel," he stammered. "I know. But, you see, I know this engine. She's cranky. I'm sure I can pull him out. Please let me try. You will, won't you? I'll give him back to you!" Sincerity glowed in his eyes from which all cunning had fled. "I'll make good. I can't have Steve's life on my hands! You'll let me, won't you?"

Kitty's head swam dizzily. She knew she alone must decide, and without hesitation. Each second was precious. Steve's life might slip away, if she did not avail herself of this one remaining chance of succor. Her eyes were closed as she battled blindly with her fears. Could she trust this despicable creature, Gunn? Still opening and closing her nervous hands, she faced him.

"Bill Gunn," she faltered hysterically, "can you bring him back to me? Oh, you must—you must! Try! Try! And if you do, I'll—I'll even—forgive you." She stepped to one side, pointing pleadingly to the idle machinery. "Try! Try!" she cried imperiously.

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Gunn sprang to the throttle; the engine choked and started. At top speed it ran, rattling on the block like a racing deer leaping brush and bracken to distance the pack baying at its heels.

"You tell him what I'm going to do!" Gunn directed in a straining voice.

Kitty had reached the well-head; she acknowledged his words with an eager nod as she bent over.

"Steve," she called bravely, her quavering tones betraying the struggle and turmoil raging within her, "Bill Gunn says he can pull you out. Shall he try now? Are you ready?"

No reassuring answer reached her ears. Instead a thick, guttural cry of "Air! This air!" rose heavily from the depths where Steve battled against the incessant din that drummed within his head and sought to obliterate his waning consciousness.

The girl exchanged a pitiable, frightened look with the men about her.

"You've got to keep his courage up," Gunn insisted with bitter resignation. "You've got to do it, Kitty, if you want him back. You've got to tell him, if you haven't already." The words cost him effort; he wrenched them out with almost a cry of pain.

Kitty understood.

She allowed her terrified eyes to wander quickly over the faces gathered about her. Her heart swelled. She touched her flaming cheeks with her ice-cold, shaking hands. The blood throbbed in her temples. Just for an instant she hesitated in a spasm of agony, then suddenly dropped upon her hands and knees.

"Oh, Steve, Steve I love you! I love you. For my sake, take heart. I want you back, Steve, and I love you dearly," she called down, defiant of those about her, confident that her sacrifice, her forwardness, would snatch him from a ghastly death.

The crowd respected her confession with averted faces.

A weak, stifled answer floated up from below:

"Thank God, Kitty! Hurry! I'm ready!"

To utter the simple words, Steve had torn aside the mantle of red blindness that was fast walling off his feelings, his memory, his sense of self, and when the syllables formed upon his bleeding lips, his ears heard uncertainly, the sound of his own voice came rolling back to him as if echoing from another existence through the portals of the past.

Gunn caught Kitty's nodded signal; his body moved forward; the line tightened. With the increasing strain, the small wire rope stretched. Instantly it became the center of unanimous, riveted attention.

"Will it hold?" Williams demanded tensely.

Gunn jerked his head reassuringly as he released the strain slightly. Then once more he threw his weight upon the lever. Again the line became taut. It quivered. It moved!

"She's coming!" the crowd whispered sibilantly. A thrill of enthusiasm rippled through their midst. They craned forward.

The line moved with the seeming slowness of the minute-hand of the clock; inch by inch it crept upward as if loth to respond to the engine's impelling force.

"Hold tight, Steve!" Williams cautioned. "She'll come with a rush when she starts!"

A thin sickly smile sapped at the gray impassiveness of Steve's countenance. The almost imperceptible upward motion awakened hope in his dulling consciousness, and he strove to show his appreciation of the straining movement that might bring freedom. His head moved slowly back and forth in the reflected sunshine from Williams's mirror.

A foot of hard-fought progress was made, and Gunn slackened the line.

"This time she'll come! This time—or never!"

He threw the sand-reel into train with the whirring machinery. The racing engine acknowledged the contact with groans and hisses as it imparted its gathered momentum.

At the impact the frail wire rope vibrated and sang like a harp-string that had been tightened after being struck. The first dull note it gave forth was low and throbbing; instantly it rose in pitch to a wail, to a shriek. For a second it hummed ominously in the tense silence. Crack! A nerve-wrenching report—a strand snapped.

Aghast, the crowd tiptoed, settling back with a groan.

Kitty's clenched hands flew to her breast in a paroxysm of poignant torture.

"Dear God!" she prayed aloud; her strength failed her; she sank limply to her knees.

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But the line held. It moved, and, with the suddenness of a rising rocket, shot skyward. A shout of joy belled out, the chorus of despairing sighs was drowned with cheers.

"Faster! Faster! She's caving above him! Quick, man!"

Williams' strident command soared above the rumble of rattling machinery; his hands shook, and the shaft of light quivered as it followed the almost lifeless burden that came rushing toward the well-head, and safety.

Kitty held her breath. She saw Steve's hand slipping from the line as his body crumpled under the swift upward pull.

"He's fainted!" she shrieked. "He'll fall back!"

But as Steve's hands fell, his arms balanced forward, circling the rope.

"No, he won't!" Williams told her with brutal positiveness. "Here, take this, and stand back!" he ordered, thrusting the mirror into her clenched hands. "He won't fall! I'll catch him as he comes out. Easy, Bill," he shouted to Gunn, and threw himself full length upon the floor, ready to grasp the limp form as it neared the surface.

With head, arms and shoulders over the verge, he clutched at Steve's clothing; then, with a guiding hand firmly holding his friend's arm, he rose with the slackening line and drew the stricken man back from the well. Gently he supported him to the floor as Gunn released the brake, and the line ran free.

THE crowd vented its relief in a cheer.

Kitty crawled heavily to the prostrate man's side, while Williams, with ready thought, tore the clothing from Steve's chest and throat. Her head reeled giddily now that the reaction had come. Her courage deserted her; her strength fled. She longed to cry, to be alone. Then Steve's eyelids flickered, and opened slowly. A grateful smile answered her imploring gaze, and without thought of her surroundings she threw her arms about him.

"My darling! I thought I'd lost you," she murmured as she kissed him. Tears of joy and exhaustion welled from beneath her lashes.

The bystanders fell back under Williams' imperious command.

"Get out, every last one of you! Understand? The show's all over! Come, hustle!" and the crowd began to file reluctantly through the door.

"See, Kitty, see!" Steve's voice was thin and shaky. "See, I've got it! I said I would!" He glanced proudly at the wrench still tightly gripped in his right hand.

"Oh, Steve!" she gasped, then, overcome by the recollection of the agony through which she had struggled, she covered her face and sobbed hysterically.

Steve made an effort to rise. With Williams' assistance he pulled himself to a sitting posture and looked searchingly at those still in the derrick, seeking one from among the many. At last, his eye rested upon the man he sought.

"Bill!" he called softly, and with a beckoning nod.

Gunn stumbled forward and, bending down, inquired in a frightened whisper what was wanted. Consciously he rubbed his jaw with a nervous hand to hide his quivering mouth and chin.

"You saved my life, Bill!" Steve told him with a thanking, heart-felt smile.

Kitty brushed her tears aside, and with the same gesture signaled a warning. She shook her head quickly, her finger to her lips, to keep back the confession Gunn seemed about to make.

In the midst of his protestations to Steve, he caught her meaning, and grinned bitterly.

"But you did," insisted Steve, entirely ignorant of the girl's appeal. He put out his hand. "I want to thank you, Bill," he said.

Gunn stared vacantly at the man before him. He raised his glance, and saw Kitty's smile of encouragement. It stiffened his actions. He seized the proffered hand mechanically, but swallowed hard. For a moment his eyes met Steve's. Then, with a longing look at Kitty, he sprang to his feet and ran blindly from the rig.

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PERCIVAL PLUNKETT PATRIOT

by James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Soul of King Throsh," "The Brothers," etc.

THIS is the simple story of Percival Plunkett, a real American, who was known for a little time as Private Plunkety Plunk.

In the early part of the year 1915, Percival Plunkett held a position as shoe clerk in the Kapsteiner Shoe Store on lower Broadway. He was a good shoe clerk. He performed his duties well, understood the stock, was civil and attentive to customers and tried his best to earn the fifteen-dollar-a-week wage which the company paid him.

The efforts of Percival Plunkett were noticed by the head salesman, a person named Marsowitz who came from Bukowina in Central Europe, and now and then the head salesman would toss a compliment to Percival in a language which he believed was English.

"Some dime," he would remark in a voice that made Percival think the words had been rolled in glue before being pushed off his tongue, "some dime if you are very ingdustrious you might get my shob when I gets a rise already."

The manager, one Stielbaum, who came from Chemnitz in Saxony, and who still retained many un-American characteristics, also fired an occasional pellet of flattery at the head of Percival.

"Plunkett," he would gurgle, breathing heavily as if the words were pushed up from his stomach, "dere is grade bossibilities in der shoe pizness. It is a pizness dot gustom brotects. Every berson must haf shoes. Derefore shoes is a good gommodity to sell.

Always be civil like you now is."

And Percival Plunkett, thinking of the bright future before him, wrote to a blue-eyed girl who lived at Troy, N. Y., and hinted at a honeymoon trip to Niagara, a three-roomed flat in Harlem and long years upon which the carpet of bliss would reach out toward a rose-tinted old age.

Percival wrote the letter in the last week of April, and nine days later, on a wonderful May morning, Fate rose up and swatted Mr. Plunkett on the spot where he carried his dreams.

PERCIVAL was busy endeavoring to find shoes large enough to cover the feet of a huge, hairy customer who had just informed Marsowitz, the head salesman, that he had come from an uncivilized section of the Baltic provinces, when the strains of a band drifted in from Broadway.

"What is dat?" asked the customer.

"'Dixie,'" answered Percival.

"Dixie what?"

"'Dixie!' The tune! Don't you know? It's a regiment that came from San Francisco. They're marching up Broadway to Central Park."

"I will go an' look," said the customer.

The huge customer grunted, lifted his bulk from the seat and moved toward the door of the Kapsteiner Shoe Store. The inspiriting strains came more loudly now.

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The May breezes carried them into the shop, and, as the hairy giant from the Baltic was the only customer at the moment, Percival and the three other clerks, Marsowitz, Stielbaum, the manager, and Miss Etta, the cashier, followed the big man to get a look at the marching regiment.

Marsowitz whispered to Percival and pointed to the giant.

"Don't let him get avay from you," he mumbled.

"It's all right," said the clerk. "He is going to buy a pair of heavy shoes I've just fitted him with. He just wants to look at the soldiers."

Stielbaum, Miss Etta, and the three clerks stood outside on the sidewalk, the hairy giant blocked the doorway, and Marsowitz and Percival Plunkett stood behind the customer, catching only little glimpses of the procession from beneath the big man's arms, but too careful of the prospective sale to ask him to move a little to the front. A three-dollar sale hung in the balance, and Percival and Marsowitz took no chances. "Dixie" might prove so intoxicating to the giant that he would drift off if he found himself on the sidewalk, and Marsowitz from the rear of the customer tried to catch the eye of Stielbaum, so that he could signal the manager to stand close up to the big man and engage him in conversation.

Marsowitz was worried. He wished the marching regiment had stayed in San Francisco, or, failing that, he wished that the commanding officer had seen fit to march his men in silence up the big thoroughfare.

Along came the soldiers, fine, stalwart, bronzed fellows who moved splendidly, legs and arms swinging to the strains of the band. Percival Plunkett forgot the big customer and pushed his head forward in spite of the silent protests of the head salesman. They were Percival's countrymen and he was proud of them. A bright light came to his eyes, his cheeks flushed and his breathing was quick.

Along came the Flag, flying bravely as the sweet May breezes caressed it, and the heart of Percival Plunkett swelled within him. The sight of the Flag thrilled him. He straightened himself up and joined in the applause which the Stars and Stripes brought from the packed onlookers. For a moment he forgot the giant from the Baltic, the Bukowina head salesman, the Chemnitz manager, and the stock of the Kapsteiner Shoe Store.

It was the big customer who brought Percival Plunkett down from the little emotional dream kingdom into which the sight of the Flag and the marching soldiers had lifted him. The giant swung his hairy face round and glared at the shoe clerk.

"Stop!" he screamed. "You deafen me!"

"I'm sorry," said Percival. "I'm only clapping my flag."

"You are breakin' der drums of mine ears," growled the huge one. "You are a fool to beat your hands mit each other like dat!"

Now it was strange that a snarl in the traffic some blocks ahead should have caused a halt at the moment the huge customer found fault with Percival Plunkett's patriotism. A junkman's cart collided with a street-car and the collision had a peculiar effect upon the life of Plunkett. The stoppage halted the Flag immediately in front of the door of the Kapsteiner store, and its wonderful silken folds were lifted up and tossed toward the shoe clerk who looked out with white face and startled blue eyes.

For a moment Percival looked at the big customer and then at the Flag. It was his Flag. The sight of it took him back a half-score of years and he grew big with the memories that charged into his conscious mind from the storehouse of the subconscious. Percival remembered how he, as a schoolboy at Public School 186 on Washington Heights, had carried the Flag each morning up the big assembly room, and all the million thrills that the position of flag-bearer had brought him were his again. He was a boy once more, a boy whose duty it was to protect the silken emblem which received its daily salute from the three thousand pupils.

Another outburst of cheering came from the street, and Percival Plunkett, American, clapped his hands with all his might and main.

"Stop!" screamed the big man. "Stop!"

"It's my Flag!" cried Percival excitedly. "I'll clap it as much as I like!"

"Plunkett!" yelled Marsowitz. "*Plunkett!* Can't you see you annoy der gentleman? Stop at once! He is your gustomer!"

"And that's my Flag!" shouted Percival Plunkett.

"Don't be one fool!" gasped the Galician salesman. "Stop it! Der gentleman wants

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to buy a bair of shoes an' you annoy him. Stop dis minute!"

The manager from Chemnitz was apprised of the situation at that minute and he thrust himself between the giant and the door-jamb and grabbed the rebellious clerk by the arm.

"You pig fool!" he screamed. "What does your senses leave you for? Eh? Is you mad a lot! Shut up I say! Shut up, quick!"

But Percival Plunkett had forgotten that he was ever a shoe clerk. He was the schoolboy flag-bearer and he thrust Stielbaum and Marsowitz from him and pushed his face close to the hairy face of the huge animal who challenged his right to applaud the Flag.

"I'll clap the Stars and Stripes whether you like it or not!" he shouted. "You or no one else can stop me!"

Marsowitz and Stielbaum, seeing a sale slipping away from them, tried to assuage the anger of the customer.

"He is crazy!" spluttered Marsowitz. "He is one madman! His brain goes round an' round like one—like one——"

"Like a spin top!" yelled Stielbaum, helping his head salesman. "Take no notice of him!"

"Why should he say I shouldn't clap the Flag?" cried Percival, pushing off Marsowitz. "I'm an American and it's my Flag!"

"An' you are welcome to it!" sneered the giant. "I do not want it."

Percival Plunkett flushed.

"It's the grandest flag in the world!" he cried, speaking as he would have spoken if any boy had dared to make a disrespectful comment upon the silk banner of P. S. 186. "There's no flag like it."

The giant laughed and showed ugly, discolored teeth.

"Pooh!" he cried. "I make a face at it. See!"

The flag-bearer lifted his flag at that moment, lifted it high as the word to move came down the line, and the Spring sunshine fell upon the silken folds. And to Percival Plunkett, once flag-bearer at P. S. 186, it seemed as if the Flag, which was the same Flag, had lifted itself up in astonishment to inquire if he, a true-born American, had allowed an alien to insult it.

To Percival at that moment, the Flag was a sentient thing, a thing of wonderful beauty, an emblem that stood for freedom, for civilization, for love of humanity, for everything that was grand and good, and all the dreams of the Harlem flat, the wedding-trip to Niagara and the sweet years over which the Carpet of Bliss would be softly spread, were forgotten. He swung his right fist into the face of the big man from the Baltic!

It wasn't a fight. It was a clawing-match in which seven people participated. Percival Plunkett landed one good blow, but after that he was knocked down and clawed at by the giant, Marsowitz, Stielbaum and the three shoe clerks who were wise enough to follow the example of their manager and head salesman.

Marsowitz and Stielbaum were crazy men. A customer had been assaulted in their store, a customer who had already signified his willingness to purchase a pair of heavy shoes on which there was a profit of forty-two per cent. In all their business experience they had never seen such a happening.

"Oh, der fool!" screamed Marsowitz. "Der —— fool!"

"Madman! Peeg!" yelled Stielbaum. "Insult a gustomer! Ach, it makes me veep!"

Percival Plunkett had no chance in the struggle. While the Galician manager was holding his arms, the huge giant from the Baltic kicked him hard in the ribs and Percival dropped.

The big man, thinking he had killed the shoe clerk, dived into the crowd that thronged the thoroughfare, while Stielbaum and Marsowitz, finding that the sale was lost forever, tried to ease their temper by immediately firing the clerk who had dared to assault a customer.

"Oudt mit him!" screamed the manager. "Miss Etta, get him his money! Four tollars it is! Dere is no money for him for dis mornin'! Joe, get his coat! Now oudt he goes!"

Marsowitz thrust the four dollars into Percival Plunkett's hand, flung his coat at him and pushed him onto the sidewalk. Percival's face was bleeding where the nails of Stielbaum had scratched him as the manager endeavored to protect the hairy Goliath who had insulted the Flag. And Percival's side was paining where the shoe of the same Goliath had been driven hard against his ribs as he lay on the ground.

The shoe clerk, dazed and bewildered,

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stumbled against Policeman Owen Harrigan, and the officer halted him.

"What's up, Plunkett?" he asked.

Percival gave a short account of what had happened and the blue eyes of the policeman flashed fire as the clerk told of the giant's insult.

"Where is he now?" he growled. "Where's the big brute now?"

"He ran," said Percival, "and Stielbaum and Marsowitz fired me because I gave him the lick on the jaw."

"Glory to the saints!" cried Harrigan. "It's a great country now, isn't it? There's a bunch along this same road that would let a man wipe his feet on the Stars and Stripes if they could get a nickel profit out of him."

"You're right," said Percival quietly.

Harrigan considered a moment, then he spoke.

"Me boy," he said, "the best job at the present time is fightin' for the land you were born in. They want recruits for the army, thousands of them, an' if you were game to smack the seven-footer on the nose, you're the man to do some of the scrappin'. Think of it, if you've got nothin' else to do."

Three hours later, Percival Plunkett, ex-shoe clerk, enlisted in the United States cavalry. A medical officer who examined him looked at the bruise on his ribs and turned an inquiring eye on Percival.

"How did you get that?" he asked.

"I spoiled a sale," said Percival grimly, "and I got that while being thrown onto the sidewalk."

II

THE heat was terrific. The sun flamed through a sky of burnished copper. The Mexican desert grilled beneath the lances that struck little spurts of fire from the mica-splashed wastes.

The six men in the adobe shelter panted as they took turns at the three small windows and fired at the little puffs of smoke that came occasionally from huge granite boulders far out on the plain. The six cursed softly as they went about their work. Their faces were haggard, their cheeks unshaven and shrunken, their lips were dry and black.

Presently one of the half-dozen spoke in a voice that was little more than a hoarse whisper.

"This heat will drive us mad," he said. "If we can't get water inside twelve hours, we can't hang on."

Five grunts came from his companions. They were chary of their words because their lips and tongues were baked with the alkali dust.

"There's one hope," said the speaker. "We've got one horse an' some one's got to take a chance."

They spoke then. Like one man the five answered together.

"I'll go," were the words each uttered.

"Listen," said the man who had spoken first, "Peter's horse is a good one an' there's a hope that a man makin' a quick dash will get through these devils. Ridin' like the mischief, he might make Howard's camp in six hours, an' they'd be about the same time gettin' to us. Twelve hours is my limit. Who are we going to pick?"

"Let's draw," croaked a lean, thin-hipped man. "We're all about the same weight, so there's nothin' in tryin' to pick the lightest."

"Plunkety Plunk's the lightest," said another. "Ain't you, Plunkety Plunk?"

"I think I am," said Percival Plunkett, one time shoe clerk in the Kapsteiner Shoe Store; then, moistening his lips, he added quickly, "I'm ready if you fellers say the word."

The first speaker looked at Percival Plunkett and then at the four others. The others were veterans, Plunkett was a comparatively new man. He had no doubt about Percival's courage; still the task was one that required a tried man and he spoke hurriedly.

"I know Plunkety Plunk is willin'," he said, "but I think every one should get a fair show for the job. Suppose we draw. I'll put six bits of paper in my hat, five blanks an' one marked, 'Ride like the devil,' an' the chap gettin' the marked piece goes an' rides."

The others nodded, and the first speaker tore a leaf from his note-book, divided it into six pieces, wrote four words on one slip and shook the six up in his hat.

"Come on," he said. "Take a draw, Lawrence."

Lawrence drew a blank, frowned and went back to his window.

"Macken!"

Another blank.

"Holdsworth!"

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Holdsworth cursed as his eyes fell upon his unmarked square.

"Ryan!"

Ryan's fingers went into the hat and foraged round as if their owner had an idea he could feel the words written upon one of the three pieces that remained.

"Hurry!" cried the hat-holder.

"Easy! Easy!" growled Ryan. "I want the ride! Me throat is baked an' I can't wait till—Gosh, I've lost it!"

"Plunkety Plunk!"

Percival Plunkett stepped toward the hat-holder. Now it lay between the two, and the four others watched.

Percival lifted his right hand, thrust it into the hat and withdrew it holding a piece of paper in his fingers.

"I've got it," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Look."

Each of the others looked at the slip as he held it up. Each read the four words which Mallory, the hat-holder, had written laboriously upon it, and as they stared at the slip, the mare standing behind the adobe shelter whinnied softly.

"You'd think she knew what we were up to," said Holdsworth. "Well, Plunkety Plunk, I hope you'll get through."

"I hope so," said Percival Plunkett.

"You'll do it," said Macken. "I've got a hunch that you will."

The three others, Ryan, Lawrence and Mallory, shook Plunkett's hand in turn and went back to the windows.

Holdsworth and Macken helped Percival to saddle the black mare. Then, as Plunkett stood ready to climb into the saddle, Holdsworth spoke.

"Remember what's on that bit of paper," he said. "Ride like the devil! I'd give my soul for an egg-cup of water right now. Good luck! Set her at it!"

PERCIVAL PLUNKETT, once flag-bearer of P. S. 186, crouching low over the saddle, drove his spurs into the black mare, dashed out from behind the adobe shelter and started at a gallop across the white sand that stretched out toward the horizon.

For a few moments his wild dash was unnoticed, then a yell went up into the hot air and a bullet whined regretfully as the black mare lifted herself and cleared a small boulder that was in her path. It seemed as if Holdsworth had spoken the truth about the mare. She appeared to be aware of the mission, and she unloosed a burst of speed that amazed her rider.

"Good girl," muttered Percival Plunkett. "Good girl!"

The noise of the firing increased and Percival Plunkett knew that the five men in the adobe shelter were doing their utmost to keep the enemy engaged. They had pinned their hopes to him and the black mare, and, as he patted the neck of the mare, he pictured their faces at the little windows watching him in his race across the desert.

From a boulder to the right, came a puff of smoke, and a bullet clipped the brim of Percival Plunkett's hat. Another puff and a second leaden pill sang a wasplike note of warning as it whizzed by his head. The man behind the boulder was a marksman, and Plunkett swerved to the left and called upon the mare.

"Come, old woman," he said. "Show 'em your heels!"

Another puff from the boulder, another spiteful whining bullet, and then Percival Plunkett had rounded a sand dune which cut him off from the marksman's view.

But Percival was not out of danger. The cowardly snipers were spread out across the glittering sand wastes, and by rounding the dune the cavalryman brought himself into view of another of the enemy who had not seen him when he was on the other side.

The second was a better marksman than the one whose attentions he had escaped. A bullet grazed the back of Percival Plunkett's neck, and the blood upon the hand with which he touched the spot told him that he had had a narrow escape.

The marksman fired again and the mare gave a scream of pain and stumbled slightly. For one dreadful instant, Percival's brain was clouded with a picture of failure, then the mare pulled herself together and went striding forward across the flat plain that lay before her.

"Go it, you beauty!" cried Percival. "Go it, old girl!"

Percival glanced behind. Far away to the left, two horsemen were galloping in pursuit. On the right, three others were speeding at a breakneck pace, keeping nearly in line with the cavalryman. The ride was on. The danger in breaking through the circle of snipers was small compared to that which threatened from the five pursuers.

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The sun beat relentlessly upon Percival Plunkett's back and neck. He was riding toward the east, and the sun had passed the meridian and was dropping westward with a tail of flame-colored clouds behind it. The air was hot, sticky, dust-laden. Now that the firing had died away, only the thresh of the black mare's hoofs and her heavy breathing broke the silence.

Percival Plunkett felt in the pocket of his khaki jacket and found the little square of paper that he had drawn out of the hat. He lifted it up to his sweat-blinded eyes and read the four words in Mallory's unformed writing—

"Ride like the devil!"

The cavalryman repeated them to himself. It was an order, an order from Mallory and the four others. They relied upon him. They had not grumbled when he had picked the coveted slip from the hat, although there might have been good reason for them to hope that some one else might draw it. Ryan was the crack rider of the regiment; Holdsworth's courage and nerve were bywords. But they had, instead of grumbling, simply expressed their belief in his ability to get through.

"And I will!" he cried. "I will!"

A curiously tinted snake reared its head from the sand and the mare snorted and leaped over the reptile as the snake struck. The mare's gait had not slackened. She was striding along at a cracking speed and Percival, glancing behind him, spoke words of encouragement to her.

"We'll do it, Black Bess," he gasped. "Do you know what was on the paper? It said, 'Ride like the devil!' Ride like the devil, Bess, and—and we're going to, ain't we, old girl?"

The biting lances of the sun struck the wound on Percival Plunkett's neck and worried him. The wound was still bleeding, but he had no time to bandage it.

The five behind were pursuing relentlessly and, though the mare was moving at a fast gait, she was unable to shake them off. They stood up on the horizon, five dark blurs against the coppery skyline, and Percival Plunkett understood that they too, had their orders. They were instructed to get him at all costs, and as he clucked to the black mare, he tried to reckon up the chances that were against him.

He felt sure that the mare had been struck by a bullet when she stumbled, but Percival could not see where she had been struck and he was afraid to pull up for a second to make an examination. He had to ride, ride as the scrap of paper directed.

The minutes went by slowly. He eased the mare a little. A dread came to him at times as he listened to her sobbing intake. He felt a mad curiosity to know whether she had been wounded and yet he was afraid to look.

Once he glanced back over the sand and he gulped with fear as he noticed blood upon the glittering white. He touched the wound upon his neck and told himself that it was his own blood, but his common sense required repeated assertions to bludgeon it into believing.

"She's all right," he would mumble again and again. "She's all right. Ain't you, old mare? You know what was on the paper, don't you? It said, 'Ride like the devil,' but I can't ride if anything happens to you, can I?"

Again he eased the mare. The pace was telling on her. He looked back at the five. They were closer. He could see distinctly the high-crowned hats, the sun glinting on the rifles that were held ready as if their owners knew that they would soon be close enough to take a shot.

And the shot came. The bullet struck a rock about twenty yards in front. Percival cursed. Another bullet flung up a curious little spurt of sand, and the mare, as if realizing danger, stretched out her neck and unloosed a burst of speed that surprised her rider.

"Good girl!" he gasped. "They haven't got us yet! They——"

Percival Plunkett gave a cry of pain and fell forward. He clutched the pommel of the saddle and held on for dear life. He had been struck, but for the moment he could not tell where.

A great wave of darkness clouded his mind for an instant. Then as it passed away he found that he was still clinging to the mare who was going at a breakneck clip across the wastes.

Slowly and with much difficulty, he clawed himself upright, using the power in his knees to offset the weakness which seemed to have come over the upper part of his body. Slowly he felt for the injury. He was not surprised when he located it. A bullet had struck him in the right side, and he marveled at his good fortune in being able to hold on.

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Percival Plunkett came to a decision then. He had to get out of range. He had to drop his pursuers at all costs.

He drove his spurs into the sides of the mare, and the mare sprang forward madly.

"Now for it!" he cried. "We've got to lose 'em. Keep it up, old beauty! Keep it up!"

The black mare laid her ears back and flung the furlongs behind her at a rate that made Percival Plunkett scream with joy. He shouted to her, shouted mad words of encouragement, and her speed increased. She flew over the ground, and the cavalryman sobbed with joy as he felt the straining of her strong quarters beneath him.

"Good girl!" he screamed. "We're losin' 'em! We're leavin' 'em as if they were standin'!"

And then to Percival Plunkett came a curious belief. He thought the legs of the black mare were growing longer. He was sure they were growing longer. He rose from the ground, higher and higher, till he felt that he was a hundred feet above the white sands over which he was moving at a rate that made him think the black mare was the fastest equine in the world.

Now and then a boulder which seemed to rise up higher than the Woolworth Building would spring up before them, but the black mare with her great long legs would take it in her stride and Percival Plunkett would gurgle like a pleased baby.

He would have liked to rest a little, but the paper on which Mallory had written was still clasped in his hand, and the paper said nothing about rest. He could still read the paper in spite of perspiration and the great speed at which the mare was traveling. The paper said "Ride like the devil" and Percival Plunkett felt that he was obeying instructions rigidly.

Patches of black shadow rose up and beckoned to him, but he ignored them. The shadowy spots called to him but he shook his head. Mallory had said nothing about resting in cool places and, besides, Percival felt that if he wished to dismount he could not. The black mare's legs were so long that it would be necessary to get a ladder before he could dismount.

FOR hours Percival Plunkett rode, the inky shadows beside the boulders calling to him, the legs of the mare growing longer and longer.

Percival knew that Ryan, Macken and the rest of them would never believe him when he told about the length of the mare's legs. They would say that he was crazy, but he wasn't crazy. He was wounded, of course, but he wasn't crazy. He could read Mallory's writing on the little scrap of paper that he had drawn from the hat. And he knew his name. He was Percival Plunkett, once a shoe clerk in the employ of the Kapsteiner store on lower Broadway, and once flag-bearer at P. S. 186 on Washington Heights.

And then a wonderful thing happened to Percival. He saw a flag, a flag that waved a thousand feet above the earth. It flew from a pole, a pole that was higher than any pole he had ever seen. And it was his Flag, the same Flag he had carried into the assembly room as a boy, the same Flag he had clapped on the morning he was thrown out of the Kapsteiner store!

"It's the camp!" he gurgled. "It's the camp, but how am I to get down off the mare's back to tell them where Holdsworth and the rest of the boys are?"

The black mare solved the puzzle that was tormenting Percival Plunkett. As the flagpole came closer, the mare stumbled forward and with a half-human cry crashed forward on to the hot sands, tossing Percival Plunkett into the arms of a sentry who had rushed to meet the galloping rider.

It was to the Colonel and the surgeon that Percival Plunkett stammered out his story.

"Holdsworth, Macken and three—three others surrounded at Redondo," he stammered. "Send—send help at once. I—I——"

His voice trailed away and the surgeon who was supporting Percival's head laid it gently down upon a horse rug which a trooper had brought forward.

"He's done," said the surgeon quietly. "He's got a bullet in the spine. How he rode with it is the greatest wonder in the world."

The Colonel noticed a scrap of paper in the hand of the cavalryman and he stooped and examined it. It was wet with perspiration but Mallory's writing was still legible.

The bugle rang out as the Colonel read, and as the five-score cavalrymen swung themselves into their saddles, the gray-haired veteran put the scrap of paper back into the palm of Percival Plunkett and closed his stiffening fingers upon it.

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"Bury that with him," he said, turning to a sergeant. "It told him to ride like the devil and it looks as if he obeyed orders. Are we all ready? Forward!"

III

FIVE days later, Policeman Owen Harrigan stopped in front of the Kapsteiner Shoe Store on lower Broadway. A little group had formed in front of the window, the eyes of all fixed upon a neatly lettered card which had just been placed on view.

The card read:

PRIVATE PERCIVAL PLUNKETT, the HERO of the REDONDO RIDE, whose death was recorded in the papers this morning, was a Clerk in the KAPSTEINER SHOE STORE before he resigned to fight for his Country.

We sell the cheapest shoes in the city.

Policeman Owen Harrigan read the sign again and again. He looked bewildered. He rocked backward and forward and scratched his left ear slowly.

"Glory be to the saints!" he said in a half whisper. "Glory be to the saints! It's a great, great country! Was a clerk in the employ of the Kapsteiner Shoe Store before he resigned to fight for his country! Mother o' me! Did I ever hear the like. The dirty——"

He lifted his hickory stick as if he would smash the plate-glass window of the Kapsteiner Shoe Store, then with a half-choked cry of rage he turned and strode down the block. Tears were in the blue eyes of Owen Harrigan, tears for a patriot who had died for the Flag.

HELL'S DELIGHT

by Stephen Chalmers and Ralph D Keefer

LIKE many superfluous younger sons, the Hon. Jack Clifford had served in the Royal Northwest Mounted. Seated one dismal afternoon by a window of the Balmoral Club, Montreal, his thoughts, wandering on long trails and piny Alaskan slopes, were recalled by the tentative, smooth utterance of 'Enery, the steward, formerly of Cheapside, London.

"Beg pawd'n, sir, but there's a person houtside as wishes to see you, sir."

"What kind of a person?"

" 'E seems rawther an 'ard case, sir, if I may be permitted to sye so. 'E wouldn't tyke no for a hawnser, and w'en I tried to hargue with 'm, sir, 'e said 'e'd knock my bloomin' 'ead off, if I may be pawd'n'd——"

" 'Enery," said the Hon. Jack Clifford, "show that person in at once."

Registering distinct disapproval, 'Enery presently returned with a large person who wore a pea-jacket of smooth navy blue over a rough gray, flannel shirt. His straight,

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strong legs were encased in tight-fitting blue breeches and topboots of a kind seldom seen south of Seattle.

His face attracted startled attention when he removed a limp Stetson. Over one eye was a large black patch. There was a strip of sticking-plaster on his forehead beneath the line of close-cropped fair hair. His general appearance suggested some recent grave crisis in his affairs, but he carried himself with jauntiness, a sort of optimism in the face of obvious adversity, an air of distinct self-assurance.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" said he, offering a large hand upon the knuckles of which were more plaster strips.

The Hon. Jack Clifford stared, then arose to his feet, slow recognition of the man bringing with it a whiff of the big, breathing pines, the whispering prairies and the silent white giants to which he had said good-by forever two years before.

"Devil Dick!" he exclaimed. "Of White Horse."

"I'll take a fizzy hootch," said Dick, dropping into a soft spot.

"The gentleman will have a rye highball," said the Hon. Jack for the benefit of 'Enery. "Two."

Now that he recognized a friend of his unregenerate Yukon days, the superfluous younger son was surprised at nothing, not even the black eye, the sticking-plaster, or the nondescript attire. Had he met Devil Dick in a drawing-room or encountered him driving a coal-wagon, there would have been no more occasion for wonder. Back at White Horse he had been a mystery; a strong, deep sort of a fellow, but externally a chameleon, taking on the exact hue of his company and environment. None ever knew what took him into the Northwest. Perhaps it was a woman; probably it was a mere restless love of seeing and doing things. He might have been of excellent family. Certainly at some time he had come in contact with a good education.

"When did you make Montreal?"

"Mushed in last night," said Richard the Devil. "And for the love of Klondyke Sal, put me next to a cloth-butcher who'll swift me into a suit of civilians. Montreal's got as much manners as a jack-rabbit. Stared at me in Main Street as if I were a stray Siwash malamute."

"And how do you like our city?" the Hon. Jack asked, with a slow-dawning, reminiscent grin.

"Quite some settlement, ain't it?" drawled Dick, twinkling. "'Most as many people here as there was in Dawson in the boom days, but tho' I must ha' mushed through fifty main thorofares huntin' you up, I didn't hear a single phonograph—not a blighted one!"

The Hon. Jack Clifford grinned as he had not done since father bought him out. The atmosphere of Devil Dick swept memory back to the sights and sounds of early Dawson with its saloons ablaze and every door exuding blasts of brazen harmony.

The gentleman from White Horse saw that he liked it. He talked on, painting scattered incidents in the slang of the barracks. An occasional hint to 'Enery anent the fizzy hootch glasses was the only reminder that he and the Hon. John were in the Balmoral Club, Montreal, and not sprawled upon twin cots at Hootalinkwa or Red Deer, off duty and swapping yarns.

MONTREAL'S comatose (quoth Devil Dick dismissally). But coming down from White Horse to Vancouver I had one hi-larious time. Was at Lower Laberge on detachment duty. There the trouble began. I yearned for Egyptian viands once more and asked furlough.

The Old Man, "Piggy" Buntline—you remember him—gave me my pass and I went to White Horse next day. I strolled into the barracks to see some of the old sidekickers and set them up a few.

About 8 P.M., while admiring the bottom of a canteen mug, in walks the Division Orderly and says the Officer Commanding wants to see me. He wasn't my D. O. or my O. C. either, and I said so.

"Now, lookee yah," said the D. O., "just because you don't belong to this division is no pellucid reason for making dizzy breaks. Furlough or no, you're a cunstible of the R. N. W. M. and if you don't hike along to the O. C. rapid soonly you'll land in clink so swift it will make your 'ead swim!"

Being the kind of brave man who is only a fool on special occasions, I went. The D. O. marches me to the O. C. It was old "Bleeder" Rathbun.

"You Cunstible Travis?" says he.

"Yes, sir," says I.

"You're going outside on furlough, I 'ear," says he. "Very well! We've got a

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lunatic in the guard-room 'ere. I cawn't spare a man of my division to take 'im out to the asylum at New Westminster. If you will take 'im, the Government pays your expenses."

Couldn't afford to turn down a chance for economy like that, and said so. Old Bleeder writes out an order for this lunatic person, shakes hands with me, 'opes I'll 'ave a jolly 'oliday, and the D. O. marches me out.

Next morning I presented my order to the provost of the guard-room, who handed out the lunatic person as if he was moderately glad to get rid of him. He was a young chap—you wouldn't know him; after your time—from Taku. He'd been thinking of home and listening to the Big Silences too much—something of that sort. You know Taku!

"You keep a heye on him," the provost warned me, "and keep your razors cached or you'll wake up to find yourself dead. He's a hell-roarer, Abe, when he gets to going right."

Abe didn't look to me as if there were medals on him for raising anything but whiskers, and he had some crop of them for a young chap—sort of untrained morning-glories.

He came along with me quietly enough to the station, never saying a word, but eyeing me sort of curious all the time. I plunked him down in the car with a bag of candy to keep him occupied while I went to look after my kit.

After presenting requisitions and getting transportation, I went back to the car and found Whiskery Abe as cheerful and contented as a Siwash with a bottle of bay-rum. He had finished the candy and, as I sat down beside him, he winked at me in a knowing way and started to take off his boots. He was lugging off his sox, too, when all at once he stopped, clapped a hand to his head, and said—

"Say, mister, have you got any more candy?"

They were the first words I had heard him utter. To encourage him to further effort I got him some more sticky.

"There you are, Abraham," says I. "You and I have got to be good friends. We're going out to Vancouver together."

"What?" says Abe, looking intently at me. "You, too? You don't look crazy!"

That was about all from me for awhile. I left Abe alone the rest of the trip—at least, as much as he'd let me. Not that he had much to say. He was too busy counting the telegraph-poles as they whisked by.

At Caribou Crossing, Chilkat Susie—yes, she's still on the job—came along the platform. Abe saw her and, suddenly sticking his head out of the window, began hollering at her without rhyme or reason, except that he said Susie was his long-lost mother-in-law's sister.

Now, Chilkat Susie is a real lady, even if she does wear moccasins and can't talk anything English except coin of the realm. Woman's intuition told her something, however. She picked up a hunk of soft coal and lammed it at my lunatic.

Abe was now certain that she was at least his mother-in-law's cousin and wanted to jump through the window and commit murder, but I got a strangle-hold and he quieted down.

"Say, mister," said he, when I loosened up on his throat, "have you got any more candy?"

He raised no more Cain until we rolled into Skagway. I got Abe out on the platform, so as to be ready when the train stopped to hustle him through the crowd to a hotel. And it was then Abraham remarked to me in an aggrieved whimper that he had lost his candy-bag. To keep him quiet I went back into the car where, sure enough, not having sense enough to carry peanuts to a chipmunk, he had left his sticky stuff.

Before I got back to the platform the train had pulled in. Like a flash Abe was off that platform and across the street. When I arrived adjacent he was doing a circus act before a delighted audience of eight or ten American buck soldiers.

He saw me coming and yelled: "Come on in! The water's fine!" and began to strip for a swim across the street. Next minute he was tearing along the main street of Skagway, waving his pants over his head and whooping like an Apache on the spree.

"Boys," says I to the buck soldiers, "will you help a distressed comrade-in-arms? That galoot's thought-shop is on the bias. He's my funeral, but I need help to round him up and reclothe him."

These American boys went to it like "Onward, Christian Soldiers." They fair lighted out on the trail of Abraham the Nut, whose shirt-tails were fluttering on the horizon at the far end of Main Street. He surely had

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a good start on us. The doors of the saloons and gambling-joints and other places of business were crowded with a mixed population that either cheered for Abe or yelled for the police.

Right beyond the Last Chance Saloon Abe ran slap into a large-sized citizen of the bad-man type who was coming around the corner, packing a case-goods jag. They both rolled in the gutter. Then Abe jerked loose and wound his pants around the bad-man's head.

"Come on, fellahs!" yelled Abraham, seeing us bearing down. "Come on! I've got him for you!" And he dug his hooks into the fellow's hair and started pounding his head on the curb.

We arrived in time to prevent manslaughter, for the bad-man was squirming around, trying to reach his gun.

"Jar loose, neighbor," said one of the buck soldiers, prying the gun away, while I held on to Abraham's whiskers.

"Say, Mister Constibule," said the buck to me, "just sashay your nut friend around the corner while I sit on this gun-man so he won't do somethin' unbecomin'."

So with some of the American boys I packed Abe off, while the others stayed to soothe the agitated gent with the gun habit. A constable is always a constable, as the D. O. pointedly remarked, and I would have stayed by that gun-man, only it was the Americans' meat. Besides, Abe was a perfectly good lunatic when I got him and I didn't dare deliver damaged goods at New Westminster.

Anyway, the buckies pulled through their end without unnecessary bloodshed and joined us where we were doing fatigue duty trying to put proper apparel on the recalcitrant Abraham, who was kicking like an outlaw cayuse. Although we couldn't get him in his right mind we eventually managed to clothe him.

THE next problem was what to do with him until the sailing of the *Amur* for Vancouver that night. He had to be looked after and it was still early in the day. I thought of locking myself up in a room with him at the Midnight Sun Hotel, but Abe himself wouldn't hear of it. He was either the craziest wise man or the wisest crazy man I ever met.

"Say, mister," says he in that gentle way of his, "don't you want to see the town after bein' stuck away on a length of Yukon trail for two years. Go ahead!" says Abe. "I wouldn't spoil your chance for millions. You just get me some more candy and I'll be all right till the boat sails."

I looked brother Abraham straight in the eye and thought I saw something there. I hauled off a bit and talked it over with the American bucks, who were just as keen as I was for an international entente in cordials.

"Tell you what," says a sorrel-topped member of the American squad, "we'll cache the gent from Bugville in the barber's shop down to the barracks while we introdooce our friend from Lower Laberge to the lofty spots of Skagway."

"Gentlemen," says I with much feeling, "I am surely grateful for this kindly interest in my welfare and that of my unfortunate compatriot from lonesome Taku, but the hint was conveyed to me by the worthy provost of the guard-room at White Horse that brother Abraham is the last person who should be installed in a barber shop. He has a distinct hobby for collecting razors. To get next to a bunch of blades would be like a day in the country to him."

"Now, you just leave that to us," said Sorrel-Top, corraling friend Abe with some assistance from the others.

In the end we took him down to the American barracks. One of the boys engaged the sentry while the rest of us smuggled the encumbrance down a passage and through the mess-room to a little cubbyhole with a barber's chair in it.

"Oh, my!" said Abe with a smile of genuine pleasure. "Look at the nice razors. Why, there must be four or five of them!"

While Sorrel-Top and a big black-haired buckie called Tim went in search of a rope, I told Abe he was wrong. There were at least a dozen razors and we were sending out for more. At that Abe looked up in my face with a slow wink and said softly—

"Gee, but I'm having the time of my life, ain't I?"

Then Tim and Sorrel-Top came back with the rope and we tied Abe in that chair tighter than the Earl of Hell's riding-boots. Abe didn't say a word except that, as we were leaving, he called me back and whispered—

"You haven't got any more of that candy, have you?"

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"No, Abraham," says I, "but if you promise to be very good I'll bring you back five candy pigs and a bag of gumd-rops."

He promised and we left him seeming quite happy. We locked the door of the barber-shop after us and then mushed up the main street of Skagway in search of civilized joy. We found it in bulk.

Assembled some hours later at the Pay Streak bar we drank to the Anglo-Saxon alliance. Then we all shook hands and drank to Abe, tied up in the barracks' barber-shop chair.

Sorrel-Top made a speech about Hands Across the Line. He waxed eloquent about the Lion and the Eagle lying down together and got in an argument with Tim, who produced his Irish goat, declaring that the Eagle was an animile that never laid down. Then a fellow with a harelip got up and recited the speech of Spartacus to the gladiators and got mad when a short squat buckie asked—

"Who in —— is this Asparagus, anyhow?"

I tell you, Clifford (and here Devil Dick signaled 'Enery to replenish the fizzy hootch glasses) they were real white men, these boys at Skagway!

LATE in the afternoon the American squad had to report at the barracks and they left me for a little while. I was glad of a chance to rest up from the fatigues of the early session against evening probabilities. But the luck was dead against me.

I had no more got my feet up on a corner table of the Pay Streak than in came a bunch of shoe-string gamblers, all chock-full of enthusiasm. They leaned up against the bar and the king coyote of the lot proceeded to announce the extent of his wickedness. He modestly allowed that he was the original rattlesnake from Serpent Gulch.

"There don't no sport here want to frame up ag'in' me!" he howled. "I'm the toughest bazoo that ever broke jail. My playmates is wildcats and I chew bottles!"

Then he broke into a ghost dance that would have made a Pelly River potlatch look like a fudge party in a young ladies' seminary.

The barkeep never said a word, but he lugged out a forty-four, placed it in a prominent position beside the cash register and slid all the bottles off the bar.

In the meantime I was thinking about what the division orderly told me. Furlough or no furlough, it was my duty as a constibule to preserve law and order. I admit it was the Americans' funeral, but they had succored me in distress and we had drunk to the Anglo-Saxon alliance and the laying down together of the Lion and the Eagle.

"My friend," says I to the playmate of catamounts, "you may be tough for Skagway, but I'm from Lower Laberge and I'll trouble you to shut up!"

That rattler from Serpent Gulch wound up his mainspring for the big strike before I got through my little oration. Then I saw that it was the same bad-man dear old Abe had tried to assassinate earlier in the program. He recognized me, too.

"Cyclowns and tornadoes!" he howled. "I knows you, young man, but ye don't know me. I'm Reddy the Rough, the Terrer of Alasker! Look out for me! I'm comin'!"

Sure enough, he came. During his progress I got behind the pool-table and grabbed a twenty-ounce cue from the rack. The Alaska Terror descended with the whole gang of coyotes behind him, like a pack of malamutes on a white man's dog.

Maybe you won't believe it, but there wasn't any shooting. For about two minutes the air was *purée* with billiard balls, cues, chairs, pool-racks, bottles and everything else that could be grabbed.

The barkeep took refuge in the ice-chest from falling sections of mirror and miscellaneous glassware. All you could see of him was the muzzle of his forty-four sticking out under the lid.

I caught a thirteen ball in a way that fetched a couple of teeth loose, but managed to reach the Terror with my left, and he suspended business *pro tem.* Then there was a breed trying to get an opening for a little knife he had. He got the butt end of a cue right in the plexus and subsided into a cuspidor with a noise like a steam calliope.

The trouble about being a constibule, Clifford, is that the worse the mixup the more it becomes your duty to stay in and arrest somebody. I remember thinking about that little D. O., while I couldn't see out of one eye, my mouth was full of loose ivory and I could distinctly hear the angels sing. And still they were fair red-headed to chew me up.

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Just about the time when I was framing a report that Constable Richard Travis died doing his duty for law and order on behalf of his blessed majesty's Uncle Samuel, the door flew off its hinges—it had got locked some way—and who should butt into that muss but those dear boys from the American barracks, and Sorrel-Top let out a yell you could ha' heard clear across the Northwest Territory.

"Come on in, boys! Everything's lovely!"

Sorrel and the fellow with the harelip led the charge, and those buckies went through that pack of tin-horn coyotes like a rocket in the circumnambient. Cliff, you should ha' seen it. It was—it was—hell's delight!

After the ball we dumped the remains on the boardwalk and, having extracted the barkeep from the ice-box, we drank once more to the Lion and the Eagle, and again to the Anglo-Saxon brotherhood, and the fellow with the harelip recited Spartacus all over again.

"Say," said Sorrel-Top, "do you always have bad dreams like that when you take a snooze. Between you and Abe it's a lucky thing Skagway's nailed to the map."

"Abe!" I suddenly remembered my Nut from the melancholy wilds of Taku. "Is he all right?"

"I dunno," said Sorrel-Top. "When we got back we found he'd got out, and——"

"Got out! Got out! Where is he now?"

"Well," said Sorrel-Top apologetically, "he didn't exactly get out. He was put out. The barber came along, unlocked the door with a spare key, and as Abe couldn't explain what he was doing tied up in that chair the barber cut him adrift and booted him into a distant spot. We trailed him up and found him aboard the Vancouver boat, and Abe says to tell you that if you don't hurry up you'll miss the steamboat!"

Abe was sure the queerest-acting lunatic I ever met. When I got aboard the *Amur*, weary and worn and sad, there he was sitting on the edge of the bunk, taking off his clothes and putting them on again. The moment he saw me he smiled softly and chirped up.

"Say, mister, did you get me that candy?"

ABOUT 2 A.M. the Hon. Jack Clifford and Constable Richard Travis, R. N. W. M. P., sat on the box of a dilapidated cab, each assisting the other to drive a tent-like quadruped on a winding course through Montreal's French quarter. Inside the vehicle the regular Jehu was being fared home, filled with the flowing generosity of his patrons.

"I say—look here, old top," said the Hon. Mr. Clifford, suddenly pulling on the left rein which was his particular rudder. "Honest, cross-your-heart, strike-me-dead and that-sort-of-thing, what *was* the matter with — with — what's - 'is - name — Abraham?"

"Nott' —— thing, 'cept scared," said Devil Dick, of White Horse, as the cab cut a sharp corner on two wheels. "He was scared of the Big Places. And being broke he just stalled crazy to get a trip out. Anything's better than Taku. You know—been there—hell's delight. Giddap, Napoleon!"

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FIRE MOUNTAIN

A TWO PART STORY

PART I

by Norman Springer

Author of "For Ways That Are Dark," "Gold At Sea," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MISSION

IT IS a cruel thing to shut up a young man between the four walls of an office, when that young man is romantic, heart-hungry, and twenty-three. It is especially cruel, when the walls are lined with dull tomes of legal lore and adorned with pictures of even duller-looking legal lights, as were the walls of Josiah Smatt's office. Blackstone is poor fare for heart hunger and adventure lust, and hot blood needs other than a law code for a safety-valve.

The window was Martin Blake's safety-valve. For a year, he had been Josiah Smatt's retainer, keeper of the outer office, slave of writs and torts and all the musty forms of law. It was a retainership that chafed, but he was prostrate before the great god, "Job." His job was clerking for the lawyer.

He hated his job—but he had to eat. So, when its savor became very bitter in his throat, he turned to the window and feasted his eyes with freedom.

It was the view that gave him succor. The window was on the tenth floor, and through it Martin had a magnificent view—the broad sweep of San Francisco bay, the purple hills of Marin, the Rock, and the opening to the Golden Gate. What more could Romance ask? It was a canvas that never wore out, and upon it Martin painted bold day dreams.

Many a time, he turned a jaundiced eye to the window and straightway commenced a most desirable adventure over the blue waters. He went voyaging; many a time he went in spirit down to the sea with the great steamers and white winged sailing vessels that passed his window in endless review.

On this afternoon Martin had his window open, and a breath of Spring tinged fragrantly the atmosphere of the law. Out there, the water sparkled, reflected the clear blue of the sky, and rippled white where the crisp breeze touched it. A tall barque had just passed out to the Gate, and Martin stood staring through the window at the water she had just sailed over, afire with errant thoughts the picture had kindled. He, Martin Blake, was upon that tall barque and he was outward bound for the Port of Adventure!

"Mr. Smatt is in, perhaps?"

The softly spoken words shattered the Castle in Spain. Martin swung about, and found himself eying a man who had entered the office and closed the door behind him so noiselessly as to be unheard. He was an odd figure, though become a familiar one to Martin these past few weeks—a Japanese dandy. Silk-hatted, frock-coated, and a brown, unwrinkled face that spoke of anywhere between thirty and sixty years. Bright, aslant eyes, and a suave and

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ever-ready smile that broke immediately Martin met his gaze.

"You will be so good as to inform the honorable that Dr. Ichi is here?" he asked in precise and stilted voice.

Ever the same—the noiseless entry, the quietly spoken request for the lawyer. Martin repressed a flash of irritation; the little Japanese, with his uncanny soft-footedness and stereotyped address, got upon his nerves. However, his orders were explicit; Mr. Smatt would see Dr. Ichi without delay or preliminary, whenever Dr. Ichi favored the office with a visit. It was already the third visit that day, but orders were orders.

So, Martin inclined his head toward the door of Smatt's private office. The Japanese crossed the room. He bowed to Martin, as stately a bow as if Martin were also an "honorable," instead of a poor devil of a law clerk; then, noiselessly as he had entered the outer office, Dr. Ichi disappeared within Smatt's sanctum.

Martin turned to his window again. But his bright day dream was fled, and he could not conjure it back again. The view was without charm. His thoughts, despite himself, persisted in centering upon the dapper little figure now closeted with his employer. The dandified Jap aroused Martin's interest.

What manner of client was this Dr. Ichi? Martin had not seen a single scrap of paper, nor had Smatt dropped a single hint, concerning the case. It was mysterious! Martin was not an overly curious chap, but he was human.

It was another of Smatt's secret cases, thought Martin. Another token of those hidden activities of the old vulture, which he sensed, but did not know about. For, though Martin attended to the routine work, though his duties were responsible—Smatt specialized and was prominent in maritime law—still Martin knew he did not enjoy his employer's complete confidence.

Much of Smatt's time was taken up with cases Martin knew nothing about, with clients who appeared to shun the daylight of the courts. The Nippon Trading Company, for instance! Martin knew Smatt was interested in a company of that name—a strange company, that apparently conducted business without using the mails. And there was business between Ichi and Smatt—money, or Smatt would have nothing to do with it. The mystery aroused Martin's dormant curiosity.

But all his speculation was pointless. Martin bethought himself of the marine affidavit lying uncompleted upon his desk. He turned from the window with the intention of applying himself to that task—and he discovered the office to have a second visitor. Another unusual figure who possessed the penchant for surreptitious entry. He observed the fellow in the very act of closing the office door.

"Say, you! Didn't you see the sign on the door, 'Please Knock'?" exclaimed Martin. "Can't you read English?"

"I'm no knocker, I'm a booster. Besides, I don't believe in signs," was the surprising response.

The visitor faced about as he spoke, and Martin took stock of him. He was a hunchback. He was seedily clad in a shiny black suit, but a modish green velvet hat, several sizes too small, perched precariously atop his very large head and gave him an oddly rakish appearance. But his face was pleasing—a wide grin, a snub nose, a pair of twinkling eyes beneath a broad, intelligent forehead. Martin immediately commenced to thaw as the other smiled.

The hunchback carried a book under one arm, a formidable appearing volume. With a dexterous flirt, he bounced it into his hand and thrust it beneath Martin's very nose.

"The bargain of the century—can not afford to miss it—wonderful opportunity first time offered," he began in a sing-song.

Martin stiffened with surprise. Not at the words; he was accustomed to book-agents of strange guise. But the voice! A rich, throaty tenor with not a squeak in it. The man's discourse was like a song.

"Cost you nothing. Wonderful Compendium of Universal Knowledge—compiled after years of labor—faculties of great universities. Cost you nothing. Absolutely free."

The golden voice sang on. Martin found his gaze upon the book, and then upon the hand that held the book. That hand! Surely, no book-agent ever possessed such a hand—brown-backed, big, and muscular, plainly the hand of an outdoors man. Where the sleeve fell away from the wrist Martin glimpsed the blue of a tattooed figure. A sailor's hand?

He raised his eyes to the hunchback's

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face, noting as he did the great length of arm, and the unnaturally square yet muscular shoulder. And the face! A book-agent might be expected to have tanned cheeks, his occupation not being a sedentary one. But surely, such a bronzed and weather-lined coating as this man's face wore was never gained by winning past janitors or tramping city streets.

"Possible to make offer only because of great advertising campaign—you reap advantage free of charge. Wonderful volume absolutely free. You merely subscribe to *Coleman's Weekly*—ten cents a week, fifty cents a month, price of magazine—wonderful Compendium of Universal Knowledge costs you absolutely nothing——"

The hunchback pattered on. Book-agent or no, Martin conceded he had the technique of the craft at his tongue's tip. His eyes—suddenly, Martin was aware of the peculiar behavior of the other's eyes. They were roving about the office from point to point, as if the fellow were endeavoring to fix in his mind every feature of the room. But most often, Martin noticed, his gaze rested upon the door to Smatt's private office, through which came at intervals the hoarse murmur of Smatt's voice. Once, atop the murmur, came a few words in Dr. Ichi's clipped and even tones—

"Plan — good — have caution — proceed——"

The hunchback ceased talking. Martin attributed his satisfied smile to assurance of a sale; the chap evidently had confidence in his musical patter. Martin felt almost sorry as he declined the greatest offer of the century. His brain was already overburdened, he kindly explained, and he dare not risk brain fag by delving into the matchless Compendium. Of course, some other day, when finances. . . .

The purveyor of knowledge took the refusal easily. Martin had expected him to lose his smile, but it grew wider. So Martin braced himself to receive the assault of facts and figures he was sure was preparing. Instead, however, came a raucous command from the other room.

"Blake, come here!"

It was characteristic of Josiah Smatt that his offices had few of the modern business accoutrements. No conventional stenographer powdered her nose and received clients in an ante-room, no traditional office-boy harried the janitor or played in the corner upon a mouth-organ, no call-buzzers frazzled the nerves.

Smatt was a prominent legal light in shipping circles, and he was not parsimonious. But he was eccentric. He carried his secrets and most of his bookkeeping beneath his hat; Martin, his one employee, was admitted to only partial confidence. And whenever Mr. Smatt wished his clerk to attend upon him, he lifted up his voice and bellowed.

It was this bellow that checked the book-agent's flow of words, and startled Martin into activity. Mr. Smatt did not like to be kept waiting.

"Sorry," Martin said to the hunchback, "but I'm called in there. You'll have to get out. Couldn't use your book anyway."

"Oh, that's all right," responded the other airily. "You will observe I do not depart downcast! It has really, sir, helped me a lot, just to visit you—helped me a very great deal. You are a pleasant chap!"

Martin entered the inner office, and he had a last glimpse of the queer, deformed little figure, book under arm, velvet hat cocked over one ear, in the act of negotiating the outer exit.

MARTIN, standing docilely before Smatt's desk, discovered himself to be the subject of a searching scrutiny from two pairs of eyes. Both Smatt and Dr. Ichi, the latter seated at the lawyer's right hand, were critically inspecting the tall, good-looking young fellow who faced them.

Martin was accustomed to the lawyer's boring glances. He returned Smatt's stare, and experienced more keenly than usual his sense of dislike for the man. Smatt's face was in keeping with his voice, which was rusty. It was bleak and lantern-jawed, with a gash for a mouth, and a great beak of a nose that thrust out between two cold gray eyes. He was quite bald. An impressive appearing old man, not one to inspire affection but fear. One year of service had endowed Martin with no sense of loyalty or liking for the man. Now, he returned Smatt's gaze with one of indifference, tinged with hostility.

"Blake, I wish you to execute a mission for me tonight," said Smatt.

Martin inclined his head in understanding. Executing missions at night-time for

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Mr. Smatt was a not uncommon experience. He rather liked these confidential errands, though he sometimes doubted the good faith of the man who inspired them. They took him into strange corners of the city, to interview strange characters. They were the one exciting feature of his drab employment.

The lawyer picked up from his desk a well-stuffed and tightly sealed legal-sized envelope. He turned to the Japanese, as if for approval or permission, and Dr. Ichi, without removing his bright, oblique eyes from Martin's face, inclined his head in agreement with that unspoken communication. The lawyer faced Martin again, but the latter had the feeling that, despite Smatt's heavy voice and forceful personality, it was the silent little Dr. Ichi who dominated the situation.

"You are to deliver this envelope to a man named Carew, Captain Robert Carew," commenced Smatt. "At ten o'clock tonight, exactly, you will enter a drinking saloon situated on the corner of Green Street and the Embarcadero. This resort is known as the Black Cruiser Saloon, and is conducted by a person named Spulvedo —you will find both names on a sign over the entrance."

The lawyer looked inquiringly toward Dr. Ichi, and the latter nodded confirmation of the instruction and description. Smatt continued.

"You will speak with this man, Spulvedo, taking care not to be overheard, and you will ask him to conduct you to Captain Carew."

Martin nodded his understanding as the lawyer paused, and extended his hand for the envelope. It was simple. This Carew was evidently lying doggo in this waterfront saloon.

"One moment!" said Smatt. "Repeat your instructions."

Martin obeyed, and, being blessed with a memory, he repeated them verbatim.

"Very good," said Smatt. "Now, for the rest." He shot a quick glance to Dr. Ichi, and the Japanese bowed. "This person, Spulvedo, will lead you into Captain Carew's presence. Under no circumstances will you deliver this envelope to other than Carew, himself. You may identify him readily by his appearance. He is a large, blond man, with a deep voice. He speaks with an English accent, using the words of an educated man. A star is tattooed in red upon the back of his right hand."

Smatt paused again. Martin, parrot-like, repeated the other's words. Dr. Ichi inclined his head in approval. Smatt continued.

"To make your identification doubly sure, you will use this precaution: When you approach Carew you will say, 'I wish to see you on the Hakodate business.' He will respond, 'It is time that business was settled. Did the Chief send you?' Then you will deliver the envelope to him. Now, repeat in full my instructions."

Martin complied correctly. Dr. Ichi silently signified his approval. Smatt handed the sealed envelope across the desk, and Martin straightway stowed it in his inside coat-pocket.

"Of course, Blake, you are to mention this matter to no one," was the lawyer's parting injunction as Martin withdrew from the room.

It seemed to Martin, as he reentered the outer office, that the room's air had the indefinable tinge of very recent occupancy. When he emerged from the private office, he seemed to be treading upon some one's heels, so to speak. He opened the door and looked out into the hall, but the hall was empty. Then he dismissed the matter from his mind as a fancy.

CHAPTER II

THE WEEPING BOATSWAIN

MARTIN lived at Mrs. Meagher's Select Board for Select People establishment, far out in the western addition. He was star-boarder, and as such made free with Mrs. Meagher's little private parlor. A fire always burned there on cool evenings, and moreover, he escaped the ragtime that nightly filled the community room where the piano was, the interminable arguments anent the European war, and the coy advances of the manicure lady.

In that little room Martin spent his best hours. It was there he retreated to read his favorite fiction, red-blooded and exciting stories, without exception. It was there he lived a life apart, a life in a strange and desirable environment. For Martin always identified himself with the sprightly hero of the evening's tale. He, Martin Blake, suffered, despaired, triumphed, and

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galloped off with the heroine. And when the story's end was reached, he returned to the drab reality of his existence with revolt in his soul.

"You worm, you well fed, white faced office grub!" he told himself. "Why don't you do something? Why don't you get out of the rut? You have no responsibilities; you are foot loose! Then why don't you get out there, where adventure is, where things happen!"

But then would come the rub. Where was "out there," and how reached by a pen-driving clerk?

After supper, Martin carried his magazine into the private parlor and ensconced himself before the grate fire. He read a yarn of ships and mutinies and treasure trove—hot stuff!

But there was a fly in the ointment of Martin's content. Of late, his sanctuary was not always inviolate. On the occasion of the past Christmas, an absent and fiendish-minded nephew had presented Mrs. Meagher with a phonograph. This instrument of torture Mrs. Meagher installed in the little parlor, and at frequent intervals she sat herself down before it and indulged in a jamboree of musical noise.

But this night Martin hoped for quiet. Mrs. Meagher had seemed busily engaged recounting rheumatic symptoms to Mary, the cook, and Martin knew from bitter experience that the recital usually occupied an hour and a half. Then, there was a good chance the matron would betake her buxom person bedward without visiting the parlor.

Luck smiled. Martin planned to read until nine o'clock before leaving the house to carry out the mission of his employer. He had no mind to leave sooner, for a keen, April wind ruled outdoors San Francisco that night.

He did read until eight o'clock, and then a rustle heralded the approach of the storm and diverted his attention from the printed page. Mrs. Meagher sailed into the room, her ample figure clothed in her best black silk house gown. Martin's spirits sank to zero—she always donned this funeral drapery before operating the infernal contraption in the corner.

Mrs. Meagher dropped into her rocking-chair and groaned tentatively. Martin read desperately. He knew as long as he kept his eyes upon his book she was much too considerate to disturb him, and between phonographic noise and rheumatic reminiscence, he chose the former as being escapable.

The good woman hitched her chair over to the machine. Martin writhed in spirit. It was not that he was insensible to harmony, even though canned. He was quite receptive while a booming basso rang the bell in the lighthouse, dingdong. He was even stoical when the sextette brayed forth the sorrows of Lucia. But the while a dread clutched him.

Mrs. Meagher had a favorite record. She played it regularly, and wept cheerfully at each performance. The piece was anathema to Martin.

He watched the old lady out of the corners of his eyes. She searched her record case and arose triumphant. The well-hated, jangling prelude filled the room. Martin dropped his book and accomplished a swift and silent exit.

In the hallway, the manicure lady bobbed her suspiciously yellow head and smiled provocatively. Martin fled to the cloak-rack near the door. Hurriedly he donned top-coat and hat. Until he finally closed the front door behind him, a tinny wail poured out of the little parlor and assailed his ears, a reedy soprano declaiming passionately that she had raised no son of hers to the profession of arms.

Martin sighed with profound relief as he slammed that door. He thus shut behind him such disagreeable facts as favorite ballads and peroxide blondes. It was like shunting a burden off his shoulders.

He stood a moment on the stoop, under the area light, drawing on his gloves and regarding the night. A night of bright stars, but no moon. A sharp, windy night, he shivered even beneath his overcoat, but the air tasted good and fresh. The darkness charitably covered the respectable ugliness of the neighborhood. Under the twinkling street-lamps the commonplace street assumed a foreign and even romantic air.

Martin's spirits mounted. Was he not setting forth on an errand of mystery? Why, something might happen to a fellow on such a night!

Something did happen, and at once, though Martin attached no importance to the event at the time. Standing there under the area light, Martin drew forth

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the envelope that was the occasion of his errand, to assure himself by evidence of eyesight that it was still in existence. He thrust it into the inside pocket of his overcoat, as being a safe and handy receptacle. As he did so, a suppressed sneeze made him aware he was not alone upon the stairway. Somebody was on the stoop before the house next door.

Mrs. Meagher's establishment was housed in the half of a three-story structure. All of the houses of the block were thus built in pairs. Only a balustrade separated their front steps.

Now Martin knew the house next door was vacant. Even in the darkness, he could discern the real estate agent's sign in the front window. Hence his surprise in beholding a man pressing the door-bell of the empty house—for that, he discerned, was what the person who sneezed was doing.

"For whom are you looking?" called Martin. "That house is empty. Don't you see the sign!"

Without a word, the man turned and ran lightly down the steps, and set off at a smart pace down the street. Martin noticed the fellow wore a long gray overcoat and cap, and that he seemed remarkably light upon his feet.

"Queer," thought Martin. "Didn't seem drunk. Maybe a tramp looking for lodgings. Didn't look like a tramp, though."

And then, as he set out for the corner and the street-car, the incident slipped from his mind.

NO STREET-CAR was in sight, and Martin withdrew to the friendly lee of the House of Feiglebaum to await its coming. Here, pressed against the window, he was sheltered from the wind that swept around the corner.

The front of the House of Feiglebaum was at that hour dark, but a few yards distant a light blazed over the entrance to the other and more profitable part of Feiglebaum's business. Johnny Feiglebaum was part of an industry indigenous to San Francisco—he kept a combination grocery store and saloon, the latter a quiet place that was stranger to mixed drinks and hilarity. It was sort of a neighborhood rendezvous; most of the henpecked husbands of the district sought haven there, and surcease of care with cribbage and pale beer.

Martin debated whether or not to enter and join in a game with one of this subdued brotherhood; he had two hours, almost, to spend ere he was due at the Black Cruiser. He decided against it as being too mild a pastime for his mood. He felt fit for adventure, this night.

An extra keen gust of wind swept around the corner and invaded Martin's refuge. He shrank back into the dark doorway in search of a warmer retreat. He backed against something soft, something alive. He swung about with words of apology on his tongue for the prior occupant of the shelter.

His startled gaze encounteerd a broad back. A man stood there in the far corner of the doorway, his back to the street, his head seemingly bowed in his arms. A man of such huge proportions, that Martin, but two inches less than six feet, himself, felt like a pigmy in comparison. The man's outline was vague and enhanced by the gloom; Martin, atingle with the unexpected collision, had the first thought it was a preposterous apparition.

THERE came a rumble from the giant's corner. It was a noise as surprising as the other's appearance; it checked Martin's apology. It was a rumble of parts; it seemed to be compounded equally of a prodigious sigh, a strangled sob, and a sneeze. It bespoke misery.

"Sick?" asked Martin.

A groan. Then a series of well-formed sighs. Then the giant turned and loomed above Martin, snuffling.

"Ow, swiggle me!" rumbled a deep and husky voice. "Ow, I'm in a proper fix, I am. Ow, where 'as 'e got 'imself to! Ow, why didn't I die afore I was born, says I!"

"Why, what is the matter? Come, come!" exclaimed Martin, aghast at the stricken voice.

The big man teetered to and fro upon his feet. He was perhaps wrestled by sorrow. But Martin smelt whisky.

"Come, brace up!" he admonished.

"Ow, strike me, I'm in for it, I am!" came the plaintive growl. "I've gone an' lost 'im, I 'ave; I've gone an' lost Little Billy. Can't find 'im, can't find 'im in the bloomin' town. I've looked in a thousand bleedin' pubs, I 'ave, and I can't find Little Billy. Walked a blister on my foot, I 'ave. Ow, swiggle me, what a snorkin' day I've 'ad!"

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The words tumbled forth heavy laden with alcohol. Martin could understand there had been a wet search. The other groaned and strangled.

"Ow, swiggle me stiff!" he ejaculated despairingly. "What am I goin' to say to the blessed, bleedin' little mate!"

"Oh, come now, don't be down-hearted," cheered Martin. The man and his words fell in with Martin's mood.

Both were unusual—this was better than listening to a phonograph's banal wail, or conversing with a giggling manicurist!

"Cheer up, there are many more than a thousand saloons in this city," assured Martin. "You have not yet tried them all. There is one in this building. Have you visited it?"

"In this building! A saloon in this building!" echoed the other. There was surprise, and much less sorrow in his voice. "Ow, swiggle me stiff, lad, let's go 'ave a wet!"

He placed a hand the size of a ham on Martin's shoulder, lurched out of the doorway, and rolled down the street toward the entrance to Johnny Feiglebaum's. He had seemed to divine instantly this particular saloon's location.

Martin accompanied the other willingly; he wished to see more of this strange giant. The street-car he had been awaiting passed by unregarded. Martin had the feeling, also, that he would have to accept the big man's invitation, whether or no—that huge hand gripped his shoulder like a vise.

Feiglebaum's was empty of its usual custom; only old Johnny, himself, from his station behind the bar witnessed with scandalized eyes their rather tempestuous entrance.

"Set 'em up for two, matey!" roared Martin's companion, or rather, abductor, as soon as they crossed the threshold.

The little German's answer was a wail of dismay.

"Ach, Himmel, you here again!" he cried at the big man. "Mein Gott! I thought at last you haf gone! Marty, mein poy, why haf you brought him back?"

Martin couldn't answer this obviously unfair question. He was helpless. The vise squeezed his shoulder cruelly, and only pride prevented him exclaiming in pain. Squirming increased the pressure. His captor half led half dragged him up to the bar, and there released him. Martin grunted with relief and nursed his misused flesh.

"I'll 'ave a pot o' beer, says I!" rumbled the big fellow, slapping his hand upon the wood with a force that made the glasses jingle in their racks. "And my friend' ere—why, 'e'll 'ave a pot o' beer, too, says 'e," he concluded, interpreting Martin's nod.

Johnny filled the order with alacrity. He evidently stood in awe of this strange man. But he spluttered indignantly as he set the drinks upon the bar.

"Why haf you brought dot man back here?" he whispered to Martin reproachfully. "Ach, he is der deffil's own! All der evening he haf been in und oudt, und he drink und drink, und talk und talk, und cry apout his trouble. He haf lost his Beely, his Leedle Beely, und he talk like I haf stolen him. *Schweinhunde!* Mein Gott, Marty, I would nod steal him—I would nod haf der *verdumpf* dog in der blace!"

"A dog! A dog! 'Oo says 'e's a dog?" The "*schweinhunde*" had sharp ears. He pounded the bar with his fist, and his voice boomed like distant artillery. "'E ain't no dog! Just let me meet the bloke what calls Little Billy a dog!" He ignored old Johnny, and glared at Martin belligerently. "'E's my mate, is Little Billy, and a proper lad 'e is, for all 'e ain't no bigger nor a Portagee man-o-war. A dog! Swiggle me stiff, that's a squarehead for you!"

He ended with a snort. Martin hastened to assure him that without doubt Little Billy was a most proper lad.

The big man received the amends with dignity. His warlike attitude forsook him. He drooped over his beer and mused darkly. He seemed oppressed by the denseness of "squarehead" stupidity; he appeared desolated by the absence of the beloved Little Billy. Martin observed two big tears roll out of the corners of the other's eyes, course down the sides of his nose and splash into the goblet of beer. The man exuded gloom.

Martin seized his first chance to take stock of the fellow. He gathered an impression of size and redness. Why, the man must stand six feet and a half in his boots! A son of Anak! And his head—no wonder the man had temper. He was afire. A red face, a red mustache that bristled, a thatch of brick-red hair that protruded from beneath a blue, peaked cap. His suit

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was of pilot cloth, and he wore a guernsey. He was unmistakably a sailor—both words and appearance bespoke the seaman. Martin was surprised to encounter such a specimen in this remote section of the city, miles distant from the waterfront.

The despondent one aroused himself. His mooning gaze appeared to encounter the glass of beer for the first time. He swept the goblet to his lips and drained it at a gulp. He seemed cheered and refreshed.

"Fill 'em up again," he rumbled at Johnny. "And set one afore my friend, 'ere," he added, with a wide sweep of arm toward Martin.

Martin was interested. He grasped the opportunity to re-open the conversation.

"Too bad you lost him," he ventured diplomatically. "But it is probable he will turn up all right, isn't it?"

The big man nodded gloomily.

"Ow, yes, 'e'll turn up all right tomorrow. Safe and sound, 'e'll sleep tonight—bleedin' safe and sound. 'E'll be in jail. That's the kind o' sport Little Billy is—can't 'ave a nice quiet time like me. In jail, 'e'll be. Ow, swiggle me, I'm in a proper fix!"

"Why, things are not so bad," said Martin. "If you know where he will be in the morning, you can bail him out."

"In the morning! Bail 'im out!" exclaimed the other. "We can't wait till no morning! We got to be aboard tonight, we 'ave! Ow, Lord, what'll I say to the blessed mate?"

"Oh, I see, you must return to your ship tonight," commented Martin. He was pleased with himself for having judged the man a sailor from the start.

The sailor nodded his head lugubriously. Two more tears tumbled his nose's length. Martin felt like laughing. It was ludicrous to connect tears and this huge husky with the fierce voice.

The man of the sea resumed his plaint.

"What'll I say to the mate? What'll the mate say to me? Aye, that's it, what'll the blessed, bleedin' little mate say to me? Swiggle me stiff, I'll be keelhauled—that's what'll 'appen to me! And it all begun so innercent, too!"

Martin murmured condolences.

"Come ashore on account of it being the mate's birthday," confided the other. " 'Ad to sneak ashore — come this morning. Wanted to get a birthday present, we did. Swiggle me, could anything 'ave begun more innercent!"

"Oh, a birthday present! You must like your officers," prompted Martin.

"Like! Like! Why, strike me, lad, we love the little mate! Ain't anybody on the 'Appy Ship as don't love the mate, from the Old Man down."

"Happy Ship?" said Martin, struck by the words' connotation. "Is that the name of your vessel?"

"What we call 'er," the sailor answered. " 'Er name is *Cohasset*—brig *Cohasset*. I'm bosun, and Little Billy, 'e's steward, and a prime steward 'e is."

The bosun of the brig *Cohasset* paused and spat stringily.

Martin feared the font of his speech was dried up, and he hurriedly bade Johnny replenish the glasses. The bosun acknowledged the office with a lordly gesture. Then his grief overwhelmed him, and he bowed his head over his glass and sniffed audibly. He cultivated retrospection.

"I 'ad 'im all right at the Ferry Building," he told Martin tearfully. "I 'ad Little Billy right enough, there."

He spoke as if he had Little Billy safely tucked under an arm at the Ferry Building. He inspected Martin suspiciously, as if Martin might have the missing steward concealed somewhere about his person.

"We was walking up Market Street," he continued, "sober as judges, both. And Billy says a bokay was what we wanted for the little mate's birthday. Fine, says I. A bokay of lilies, says 'e, because lilies means purity. No, says I, they got to be roses, roses meanin' beauty. And so we stops into a place or two to talk it over. Swiggle me stiff, could anything 'ave begun more innercent? Just going to buy a bokay, that's what! And now——"

The bosun sighed. He was crushed by the fell consequences of a virtuous intent.

"Ow, swiggle me, lad, what'll I say to the bloomin' little mate, as trusted me so?" Tears came again to the bosun's eyes. "The little mate is goin' to feel terrible hurt—us sneaking ashore, and all," he concluded miserably. "Ow, swiggle me, fill 'em up again!"

Martin gulped over his glass. He was astonished. His cherished and carefully nurtured conception of the iron-souled men of the sea was receiving knocks. Here was a sailor, a man with all the ear-marks of a

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pugilistic temperament, who wept because the tender feelings of the mate might have been bruised. He vowed he loved the mate, he and his shipmates! What a queer mate, thought Martin.

Martin knew all about mates. An ardent perusal of the literature of the sea, from Captain Marryatt to Captain Kettle, had familiarized him with their character. They were an iron-fisted, brazen-voiced race, who swanked and swaggered about the decks and knocked the sailormen galley-west.

The self-reliant and rather disdainful demeanor of the master-mariners who occasionally visited Smatt's office had confirmed this estimate—they had once been mates. Had the boatswain mentioned a fear of being met on his return to his ship with a flailing capstan-bar, or a dish of belaying-pin soup, Martin would have understood. Mates were hasty men. He could have properly sympathized with the boatswain over such a prospective fate. He could have given him legal advice as to his rights. But this mate of the brig *Cohasset;* this mate who commanded nosegays on natal occasions; this mate who inspired love, and brought bibulous tears to the eyes of this toping giant!

But another surprise was coming to Martin, one that touched him more intimately. The boatswain slouched over the bar, deep descended into the slough of despond. Martin wished to renew the interesting conversation, but hesitated how to begin. Funny chap, this sailor, rather soft and chicken-hearted.

The boatswain muttered to himself. He was evidently delving into the clouded realm of memory. Martin caught disconnected words:

"Billy—so innercent. Swiggle me—brown devils——"

Suddenly the boatswain straightened up and exploded a tremendous oath.

"It was them blighted brown devils!" he swore. "What chance 'as a poor 'unchback against them blasted Japs? They get 'im in 'Onolulu, and, swiggle me stiff, they get 'im in 'Frisco. It was that blasted shark, Ichi! It was Ichi, says I, as took Little Billy!"

The boatswain thumped the bar. He was a man who sees a light and likes it not.

Japanese! Hunchback! Ichi! Martin seemed to see a light, also, a dim, uncertain light. Perhaps it was the association of words—Japanese, hunchback, Ichi.

Martin suddenly recalled the hunchback book agent of the afternoon. In his mind's eye, he beheld the quaint figure standing before him in Smatt's office, while Smatt and Dr. Ichi held conference behind closed doors. But it seemed preposterous to identify that friendly, glib little deformed man as the missing Little Billy, as the bosom friend of this lachrymose viking. And what could this rough seaman know of the exquisite Dr. Ichi?

The boatswain ceased his vituperation of the Nipponese Empire, and the men thereof, through sheer lack of breath. Martin grasped the opportunity.

"Say, what does Little Billy look like?" he queried. "Did you say he was a hunchback? How was he dressed?"

" 'E 'ad on his go-ashore togs," said the bosun. " 'E's a proper toff, is Little Billy, when 'e's dressed up. Yes, 'e's a 'unchback, but you don't notice 'is 'ump after you know 'im. 'E's a lot straighter than some without a 'ump—'e's a white man, is Little Billy. And 'e's a proper toff—'e's eddicated. Swiggle me, 'ow 'e can chew the rag! And sing! Sings like a blessed angel!"

"Did he wear a black suit and a green velvet hat?" asked Martin.

"Yes, 'e did," answered the boatswain excitedly. " 'Ave you seen 'im?"

"Yes, this afternoon," laughed Martin. "You need not worry about your Little Billy. Neither the police nor the Japs have captured him. He is improving his chance to pursue the avocation of book salesman."

Martin recounted his meeting with the purveyor of universal knowledge. The boatswain listened silently, and his red-shot eyes glinted suspiciously. It seemed to Martin he was not so drunk as a moment since.

"But, say," finished Martin, "who is this Ichi you mentioned? Do you know Dr. Ichi?"

"Do I know Dr. Ichi?" echoed the boatswain.

"Do I know——"

He glowered at Martin. The query seemed to inflame his temper.

"Do you know Ichi? Hey? Say, do you know Ichi? That's what I want to know!" His manner became threatening. "Why, swiggle me stiff, you must be one o' them, yourself!"

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Assault seemed imminent. Martin backed hurriedly away.

"No, no, you are quite mistaken," he assured the boatswain. "You may be sure I am not one of them, whoever they are. I am your friend."

The boatswain subsided growlingly. He was plainly suspicious—of what, Martin could not guess. But it was evident that any mention of the name of Ichi peppered his temper.

If Martin had been a cautious young man he would have let well enough alone. The boatswain seemed a hasty and a heavy-fisted man. But Martin's interest was more than piqued. Here seemed a chance to learn something about that mysterious Japanese. This sailor appeared to know him. Some light might even be thrown upon his errand to the Black Cruiser. The papers in his inside pocket oppressed him with their secret.

"Perhaps Little Billy is down on the water-front," he remarked casually. "He mentioned to me that he was going to look up a friend on the Embarcadero—a fellow named Carew. Do you know Captain Carew? At a place called the Black Cruiser?"

The boatswain received the remark in a most disconcerting manner. He stiffened and stared at Martin, mouth agape, for an appreciable instant. He seemed breathless. The semi-paralysis of drunkenness seemed to flee his face.

"Carew! Did you say Carew?" he at last exclaimed. "Strike me, 'e says Carew!"

It seemed that the boatswain had received some momentous morsel of information difficult to digest. Suddenly he smote the bar with his clenched fist. "Carew—'Wild Bob' Carew!" he cried. "And Wild Bob Carew takes a 'and in this!"

This was progressing!

"Oh, so you know Captain Carew?" prompted Martin.

The boatswain turned. He regarded Martin strangely. His face was set and stern. He seemed a man for whom the moment of badinage is past and the moment of action is come.

"You talk of Ichi, and then you talk of Wild Bob Carew!" he said to Martin. "Swiggle me stiff, young man, you *are* one o' them!"

His great hands reached toward Martin. There was annihilation in his eye. His attitude was a sudden and complete declaration of war.

Martin did not await that onslaught. He started for the door. Fortune favored him—uncounted potations, perhaps, had rendered the boatswain a bit unsteady on his pins, and, as he left the support of the bar rail and lurched for his victim, he lost his balance. He sat down on the floor with a crash that shook the building.

The boatswain swore, Johnny Feiglebaum emitted a wail as three glasses bounced off their rack, and Martin kept on going. As he passed through the door, the boatswain was scrambling agilely to his feet. Martin was a young man in a hurry.

He sprinted for, and boarded a passing street-car, just as the boatswain reached the curb. He paid his fare, passed inside the car, and sank thankfully into a seat. He was aglow with his adventure. Something to remember, that affair with the weeping boatswain! But what was the fellow so sudden about?

Thus did Martin consign the boatswain to the limbo of memory. He was inside the street-car, so he did not see the automobile, driven by a figure in gray overcoat and cap, that drew up at the curb beside the boatswain. Nor did he observe that automobile's consequent strange behavior in persistently keeping half a block behind the slowly moving street-car the whole distance to the waterfront.

CHAPTER III

THE HAPPY HUNCHBACK

THE clock on the tower of the ferry building showed fifteen minutes past nine when Martin dropped off the car at the foot of Market Street. He paused a moment on the corner, enjoying the never-ending bustle about the city's gateway. He had plenty of time—Green Street, and the black cruiser, was but a quarter hour's leisurely walk distant, and it was then forty-five minutes till ten o'clock. He turned and walked slowly northward along the Embarcadero.

The wide street was swept by a keen wind, and Martin found the night even rawer than he had anticipated. But overcoated, he was protected, and the walk was anything but lonely and uninteresting. To his lively mind, this night stroll along the famous East Street was a fitting complement

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to his strange encounter with the red boatswain of the brig *Cohasset*, a fitting prelude to the secret business he was engaged upon.

The very breath of the street was invigorating—the salt tang of the breeze, the pungent, mingled smell of tar and cordage from the ship chandleries, the taste of the Orient from the great warehouses, even the gross smells of the grog-shops, and it set Martin's blood a-coursing. It conjured visions of tall ships, wide seas, far ports.

Across the way, at the wharves, great steamers were disgorging. The rattle of their winches filled the air. On his side of the street, the sidewalk was thronged with stevedores, stokers, sailors, what not. Each of the innumerable saloons he passed possessed its wassail group, and rough ditties boomed out through swinging doors. Great loaded trucks rumbled by. It was a world that worked and played both night and day.

But as Martin continued northward, the street's character changed. The kens and cheap eating-places gave way for the most part to the warehouses—great brick and concrete fortresses that turned a blank, dark face to the night.

Pedestrians became few, mainly straggling seamen bound for their ships. Across the way, the steamers at the wharves were smaller, and here and there loomed the spars of a sailing vessel, a delicate tracery upon the blue-black starlit sky.

Martin speculated upon these last. The intricate, woofed masses of wood and cordage captured his fancy. He wondered if by any chance the boatswain's ship was over there. He wondered what the brig *Cohasset* was like. He wondered what the "blessed little mate" was like. He visioned that surprising person who had such influence over rough boatswains—a prim little man with mutton chop whiskers, he decided. Yes, the "blessed little mate" of the brig *Cohasset* would be a little, white-crowned, be-whiskered old gentleman, perhaps some what senile and decrepit. It was inherent respect for old age that inspired the boatswain's affection.

So musing, Martin came to a by-street that divided two warehouses. He crossed the alley, but lingered on the far curb.

The alley was dark, but he noticed some distance down it, the outline of an automobile standing with lights hooded. He had a passing wonder at the presence of an apparently deserted machine in such a location, but it was a sub-conscious interest.

The next street, he knew, was Green Street. Those lights that shone on the next corner must mark his destination, the Black Cruiser saloon. He pulled out his watch; still five and twenty moments before ten o'clock.

As he stood there under a dim street light consulting his timepiece, there came to his ears out of the darkness just ahead, a voice, a rich and throaty tenor, singing softly. The sweet sounds pierced his preoccupation. He looked, and some thirty or forty paces distant perceived a gnome-like figure perched atop a fire hydrant, at the edge of the sidewalk.

The figure was little better than a grotesque shadow in the gloom, but there was no need of light to give definite shape. That pure, musical voice once heard was not easily forgotten. Martin knew the missing steward of the brig *Cohasset* was there before him.

The voice rose and fell in a careless carol, an ancient, lilting, deep sea chantey.

> A roving, a roving,
> Since roving's been my ru-u-in,
> I'll go no more a roving,
> With Thee, Fair Maid.

Martin stood entranced. The songster adventured on with the "Amsterdam Maid", another stanza and chorus. The soft, bell-like tones, the salty words, the air, like all the chanteys, both sad and reckless, caressed Martin's ears like a siren charm. The boatswain's words, "'E sings like a blessed angel," crossed his mind. Rather, a blessed merman! To Martin, greedy for the oceans and beyond, the ditty seemed the very whisper of bright and beckoning distance—a whisper of tropic seas, of spice-scented nights, of blue isles. It heaped fuel on his sea-lust. His heels itched.

The song ended and was followed by a chuckle, a care-free clucking of subdued mirth. The singer was evidently in a jovial mood. A few softly spoken, laughter-tinged words reached Martin.

"The audience is requested to kindly move forward. No extra charge for box seats. Front row reserved for bald heads. Next show starts right away. Especially staged for young gentlemen of the law."

MARTIN came to himself with a start. The words were addressed to him. He was the sole audience in sight. And the facetious hunchback evidently recognized him, remembered him

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and the fact of his employment in a law office. Martin was standing beneath the dim glow of a street lamp, but Little Billy must have very sharp eyes to recognize features in that half-light.

Martin moved forward promptly. First the weeping boatswain, now the happy hunchback. It was a night of odd meetings! But Little Billy seemed not so downcast as the bosun.

"Ah, ha, my amiable acquaintance of the afternoon walks abroad!" chucked the voice, as Martin came to a halt beside the hydrant. "Is it thus he cools a brow fevered of too much Trent and Blackstone?"

"Well, it is a good night for such a cooling," was Martin's good-natured retort.

"True," admitted the other. "And other things than the law fever the head—heavy ordnance of cruisers of accursed blackness, the fatal rum and gum, the devious workings of the Oriental mind, the slithering about of fat and greasy varlets. Yes, many things fever the brow, and 'tis a good night for a cooling. As witness!"

Martin stared at the other. No reek of alcohol met his nostrils, as with the boatswain, but, none the less, Little Billy's cryptic jargon confirmed his suspicions. Also drunk, he reflected. The revered and gentle old mate of the brig *Cohasset* would have cause for grief when his two prodigals came roistering home.

Martin could not make out Little Billy's features very distinctly; the hydrant was beyond the street lamp's circle. But the hunchback's body was plain enough—the queer body squatted upon the hydrant, legs dangling, the ridiculous velvet hat rakishly aslant the large head. The hunchback's eyes were bright and alive.

"I can well believe your mind is care-ridden," bandied Martin, falling in with the other's mood. "It must be a wearisome and thankless task to scatter universal knowledge amidst the brainless. Have you still got your book? That thing you tried to sell to me?"

"Alas, I must confess I have it not," was the blithe response. "I ditched it, sir. It oppressed me to bear about such a store of wisdom. The marvel of the ages, the compendium of universal knowledge, reposes in the dust-bin. Mayhap some aspiring dustman, in whose mind smoulders untaught genius, will chance upon it. It may prepare some dim soul for future brilliancy—the arts, the crafts, the sciences, are all contained in that wonderful volume. Who knows, out of that black dust-bin may rise a radiant glow of light. The janitor, the collector of garbage, the industrious people who rake over the dumps—there are many chances of the right hands grasping that printed jewel.

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

"'Tis a pleasant thought, my legal friend. Ah, I am happy in contemplation. I may not have lived in vain."

Martin grinned.

"You certainly are an optimist," he said. "But why did you cast such a wonderful gem aside?"

"Alas, the grossness of the commercial classes, the brutality of the tired business man! We Americans are a rude folk, my friend; the courtesies are absent from our manners. Now, I am a young man with tender feelings, both mental and—er, physical. And these trousers I wear have already rendered long and faithful service; they have arrived at the stage where they require, let us say, humoring. The oft repeated impact of a number ten boot upon such delicate fabric could have naught but dire results. I discarded the book, sir, and resigned my membership in the peripatetic brotherhood, to avert a catastrophe. Both cloth and nerves were frayed. I am a cheerful youth, but sensitive, and I require considerate treatment to be happy. Ah, you are laughing! Never mind, I like people who laugh—like great Cæsar, I would have them about me."

"Pardon me," gulped Martin. "I was just thinking how aptly the bosun described you. ' 'Ow 'e can chew the rag!' he said. And you can."

"The bosun!" exclaimed the other. "Did I understand you to say 'the bosun?' Can it be you have met my heart's chum, my dear bosun?"

"You bet I did!" replied Martin emphatically. "And I was lucky to end the encounter with a whole skin. Hasty man, your dear bosun!"

"'Tis true," admitted Little Billy. "He requires coddling, does my bosun. Red hair always does. My bosun has a tender heart, and he is a creature of impulse. Beneath that rough exterior surges the artistic temperament. But tell me, was the bosun,

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by any chance, inquiring for one Little Billy?"

"He was," said Martin. "Not only inquiring for Little Billy, but weeping for him, fighting for him—and for the larcerated feelings of the dear mate of the brig *Cohasset*. Of course, I know you are Little Billy."

"Your perspicacity is remarkable," said Little Billy. "I am discovered. But your news is disturbing. Tears and temper are pregnant signs with my redheaded friend. You did not, by any chance, meet him in the city Bastile?"

Martin sketched for the other the scene at Johnny Feiglebaum's.

"But the bosun had the same misgivings of the police on your account," he finished.

"He stated positively you would sleep this night in jail. He gave you a turbulent character."

"Base libel," asserted Little Billy. "Bosun has imagination, but it functions within narrow limits. He is solely a son of experience. His idea of a pleasant and well spent evening ashore, is to introduce into the physical system an indefinite amount of variously tinted alcohol, and then to try a brave whirl of fisticuffs with the scorned minions of the law. To his understanding there is no other way of spending a holiday. Hence his solicitude for Little Billy. Of course, thinks he, Little Billy is off alone a-roistering. Why else should he have given his bosun the slip."

"Did you give him the slip?" said Martin. "He thinks he mislaid you—that is a point in his distress. Did you run away from him to become a book agent?"

"You do not understand," stated the hunchback with dignity. "It was but a manifestation of the wanderlust, at once the curse and the blessing of my misshapen existence. Behold in me, sir, the rover, the argonaut, the adventurer!"

He straightened his slouched figure upon its slippery seat and attempted to strike an oratorical posture. He lost his balance and lurched sidewise towards Martin. He grasped Martin's overcoat.

Martin good-naturedly put an arm around the other to steady him. Little Billy, he guessed, was rendered dizzy by that rum and gum he had darkly hinted at. The hunchback teetered and clung to Martin's overcoat. Not for an instant did his tongue cease wagging.

"I am an explorer of strange lands, strange men, strange pursuits," he told Martin. "Behold in me a rollicking blade of the sea; one who has matched wits with all races, all colors, and sometimes, alas, come off second best; one who has followed many occupations. A sailor—yes. A book agent—yes. Also, sir, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. A wooz, a wizard, a king of legerdemain. Student, actor—But why continue?"

He had regained his balance upon his precarious seat by this time, and he finished with a fine, sweeping gesture:

"In this crippled carcass doth abide a vagabond spirit whose wanderlust has no purely geographical basis. I wander the wide world over, yes! Also, I wander in and out of men's lives, in and out of men's affairs. To wander—'tis my excuse for living. A fascinating obsession, sir!"

Martin was charmed. Never had he encountered such a flow of words, such musical eloquence. What a lawyer this chap would make! But Martin was also oppressed by his consciousness of the flight of time. He wanted to linger with his quaint companion; but the time!

He reached for his watch and noted that Little Billy's clutch had opened his overcoat. He struck a match and discovered it was four minutes to ten—four minutes to reach the next corner. He could make it in two, still it was time he was moving.

"I must leave you," he said to Little Billy. "I've an errand to that saloon on the corner. Wait for me; I'll be back this way in a few moments, and we'll go get a bite together."

"Would that I could," said Little Billy. "But I, too, must depart. My ship awaits."

"Well, then, so long," said Martin. "You know where I work, Little Billy, look me up sometime. Be glad to see you. I won't forget this meeting."

"Good-by. No, you'll not forget this meeting," responded the hunchback. He slipped down from his perch and shook hands. "No," he repeated, "you'll remember me all right."

Martin strode for the corner, and the Black Cruiser. Little Billy ambled across the street towards the dark wharves, and as he went he whistled blithely.

The street was empty. Martin passed but one living being during the rest of his

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journey. This was a figure in a gray great-coat and cap, who lounged against a telegraph pole across the street from Martin's destination. The gray figure stared steadily towards the wharves; Martin passed it by almost without notice.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK CRUISER

MARTIN was disappointed. The Black Cruiser—delectable name, of which he had expected much—was, it appeared, housed in a commonplace and very ugly two-story wooden building, a building with many dark and shuttered windows on the upper floor.

From where he stood upon the corner, Martin could see that the building was of considerable depth, and that the saloon appeared to occupy only the front downstairs portion. The upstairs, with its many shuttered windows, had the aspect of a deserted rooming-house. Just before him, over the closed door to the saloon, was the inscription Smatt had spoken of, in plain black letters, "Black Cruiser Saloon, Diego Spulvedo, Prop." It was a sordid and unprepossessing exterior; Martin felt that the Black Cruiser would prove the anti-climax to his evening's adventures.

The second-hand of his watch climbed toward the hour. He knew old Smatt's passion for exact punctuality; not a second before the appointed time must he enter the place. The hand touched the required point. Martin felt of the paper in his pocket and opened the door.

He stepped into a low-ceilinged bare and dingy room. The place reeked of stale drink. A battered bar filled one side, and before it stood five men in a row, attended upon by a heavily paunched and aproned fellow. Martin accosted this last, as he approached the bar.

"Mr. Spulvedo?" asked Martin. "I wish to see Mr. Spulvedo."

The aproned man regarded him with a stare from heavy lidded and nearly closed eyes. He had a swarthy, greasy, fat face, this officer of the Black Cruiser, and moist, thick lips. Martin recalled Little Billy's reminiscence concerning the "slithering about of fat and greasy varlets." Was this the varlet? The name fitted.

"Spulvedo!" repeated Martin. "Are you Mr. Spulvedo?"

"Yais," drawled the man.

Martin dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I would like to speak with you alone," he commenced.

He shot a glance out of the corners of his eyes toward the five patrons. Smatt had said to take care not to be overheard. He caught his breath with surprise. The glance revealed five stolid, yellow-brown faces turned toward him, five pairs of black, oblique-set eyes regarding him intently. Five Japanese! They were interested in him, there was the thrill. Martin sensed some connection between himself and the five. That envelope in his inner pocket!

"You weesh to speak weeth me, yais?"

The drawling voice compelled his attention.

"Yes—alone," said Martin.

Spulvedo nodded. He turned and waddled fatly around the farther end of the bar, and Martin rejoined him at the other end of the room.

"You are the messenger we expect, yais?" purred Spulvedo.

"I wish to see Captain Carew," stated Martin. "I was told to see you and ask for him; told you would conduct me to him. Is he here?"

"Yais, you see heem," answered Spulvedo.

He turned to a door in the wall behind him and unlocked it. He opened it a crack and held whispered parley with some one within. Then he turned to Martin.

"Thees way—come!" he bade.

Martin brushed through the door, opened just wide enough to admit his body. He expected the greasy saloonkeeper to follow, but instead that worthy slammed the door upon him and turned the lock. Martin was left alone in pitch darkness.

He stood still, nonplused by that cavalier desertion and disturbed by the darkness. He stretched out both arms and touched two walls. He was in a hallway. Alone? The air about him seemed to be filled with rustlings. He fancied he heard breathing. He took a tentative step forward, arm outstretched. A cold, clammy hand grasped his wrist and drew from him a startled yelp.

"Have no afraid," soothed a soft voice. "I make show he way to he hon'ble."

There was, it seemed, more than one fashion in spoken English at the Sign of the

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Black Cruiser; this fellow did not talk like Spulvedo. Martin's eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, and he made out the vague outlines of a short figure before him. The figure moved, and the clutch on his wrist urged him to follow.

They moved forward some twenty paces, passed through a door, and encountered a stairway leading upstairs at right angles to the passage they had just traversed. It was not so dark here; a gas light burned somewhere in the hall upstairs, and a moiety of its glow found its way below.

His conductor released his wrist, and commenced to ascend the stairs. Martin, as he started to follow, noticed there was a second door at the foot of the stairs. He guessed it let upon the street.

They gained the upstairs landing and paused. Martin saw before him a long hall with at least a dozen doors opening upon it. A gas light burned at the farther end. As he had suspected from without, this place was, or had been, a cheap lodging-house. Nothing save that light seemed to speak of occupancy now.

Martin took his first good look at his guide. He was, as he had noted on the stairs, a Japanese; a chunky little man with an apologetic manner, and a muscular and bow-legged figure. If he had been a white man, Martin would have listed him a sailor.

The Japanese smiled. His teeth flashed startling white in his dark face.

"He, hon'ble, catch it Captain down there," he stated.

He waved a hand toward the gas light at the other end of the hall. Then he opened the door of the room nearest to hand.

"He, hon'ble, stop by here," he invited. "I go make prepare."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. There seemed to be many preliminaries to an audience with this Captain Carew. Through the door the Jap held open he saw the outlines of a bed, and a rag of carpet. When he stepped through the door, the musty, sour air of the room smote his nostrils like a blow.

The Japanese closed the door, and the retreating echo of his footsteps sounded from the hall. Martin had not expected to be thus shut in darkness, but after all it was a small matter. He felt his way to the bed and sat down on its edge.

After a moment he struck a match. The flare revealed, as he expected, the meanly appointed bedroom of a tenth rate hostelry. The single window was shuttered.

He composed himself to patience. This business was getting on his nerves. This visit to the Black Cruiser was not proving the evening's anti-climax, as he had feared, but he was not enjoying himself. The loose face of the Cruiser's commander, the mysterious Japanese, the disturbing secrecy, the foul air—he would be glad when his errand was completed, and he was once again outdoors in the clean, fresh air.

There was an alien taint in that poisonous room. With the Japanese in mind he placed it—it was that indefinable odor the man of the Orient leaves about his abiding place, the smell one gets during a walk through Chinatown. Was this Spulvedo conducting this rookery as a Japanese lodging-house?

A strange place for a sea-captain to lodge. This Carew—this "Wild Bob" Carew, as the boatswain had termed him—must be a man very indifferent to his surroundings, or else mightily anxious to remain under cover. The captains Martin had met were particular men; one would not find them in such a noisome hole. This Carew must be some rough renegade. Perhaps he was not even white; perhaps he was a half-caste. That would explain his choice of lodgings. One would think from all the secret mummery with which he surrounded himself that he was the Mikado, himself. He certainly was not very popular with the boatswain.

Thus far had Martin got with his musings, when his attention was attracted by noises that suddenly disturbed the unearthly quiet of the house. They reached him quite plainly through the thin walls.

A door slammed, below stairs. He heard sounds of a scuffle. The sounds drew nearer—grunts, exclamations, footsteps. They were coming up the stairs. In the hall outside a door was noisily opened. Some one ran past his door, and sentences were spoken in a harsh, clicking, alien tongue.

Martin sat tensely on the edge of the bed. What was about, there in the hall? The scuffling had reached the head of the stairs; now it was opposite his door. Several pairs of feet were making that noise. Martin heard a voice exclaim chokingly, and in English—

"Let go—let go of me!"

It was a strange voice, a rich and thrilling

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voice, and it carried an appeal. A man's voice?

Martin felt his way to the door. This affair without was none of his business, but he must see what was being done to the owner of that voice. He must confirm or dispel that vague suspicion.

He turned the knob and pulled, and the door came a few inches. There was an exclamation from some one who stood in front of the door. An arm shot through the opening, a clenched hand impacted against the pit of his stomach, and Martin went reeling backward. The door slammed shut and the lock clicked.

Martin fetched up against the bed and sat down heavily, experiencing that sharp agony that follows upon a plexus punch. In that brief instant he had held the door ajar, however, he had witnessed a sight that caused him to ignore the pain. He had seen what was transpiring in the hall. He had seen the group of little yellow men clustered about and urging along a single figure that slightly overtopped them; a figure clad in a gray overcoat.

At the very second Martin had looked, a gray cap had fallen from the head in the scuffle, and a wonderful mass of dark hair had tumbled down about the gray-clad shoulders. An excited, protesting face had turned toward him. It was a woman those chunky aliens were urging along the hallway, a woman clad in a man's gray overcoat. A white woman—a young and beautiful woman!

Martin crouched on the bed's edge and panted to recover his breath. The scuffling without grew faint, a door slammed, and the house was again quiet.

Martin's mind was awhirl, but uppermost in the confusing chaos was that startling picture, photographic in its clearness, of the squat outlanders surrounding the protesting figure. A woman—a white woman—in the hands of these yellow men!

Surely he had seen aright. It was an ill light in the hall, but he had looked from a dense darkness, and had seen clearly. And had he not heard her voice? And seen the feminine tresses tumble about the gray-clad shoulders as the cap came off? There was some faint stirring of memory in connection with the thought of that gray, mannish apparel, but Martin was too excited to notice it. He was possessed by the event. He had caught a glimpse of the angry, vivid face. Angry, that was it—not fear, but anger, in her bearing. They had not wanted him to observe the incident, the outrage. They had offered him violence. They had slammed and locked the door. He was prisoner.

By this time, Martin, a thoroughly aroused young man, was again at the door. He, Martin Blake, would not submit to maltreatment and imprisonment! He would find out what this yellow crew was doing with that girl.

In the back of his excited mind danced grim shadows of the tales every San Franciscan knows; stories of white slaves, of white women being seen entering Oriental dens, and being lost forever to the world that knew them; of horrible relics of womanhood being discovered years after in some underground cave of Chinatown. Sickening thoughts!

Martin yanked at the door and pounded upon the panel. His blows echoed without, but brought no other response. He lifted his foot and drove his boot against the door. It shivered and splintered.

Before he could kick a second time, there came a cry from the hall, a hurried footfall, and the door was unlocked. Martin jerked it open. Confronting him was the Japanese who had been his guide, who had gone to "make prepare" Captain Carew.

"You come now," announced the little man, bowing courteously.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Martin angrily. "Who struck me through the door? How dare you lock me in? Who——"

"He Captain speak you come," said the other, smiling blandly. He shed Martin's rain of words as if he were some yellow oilskin. "I make him way—hon'ble follow my show."

"What is going on in this house?" demanded Martin. "Who was that white woman? What was that gang doing with her?"

The other backed away before Martin's excited questioning. "No understand," he said. "No woman—no gang. No savvy."

"No savvy—big lie!" cried Martin, and he pounced down upon the gray cap which was lying on the hallway floor. He held it up for the other's inspection. "You savvy this?" he demanded.

The Jap shook his head. His smile was gone, and there was a hostile gleam in his eyes.

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"That—no understand," he said crisply. "You come for he Captain—you catch business he Captain!"

Martin saw he could get nothing from this fellow. He was being told very plainly to mind his own business. Very well, this Captain Carew was perhaps a white man.

Without further words, Martin followed the Japanese. They went the length of the hall and paused before the last door, the one before which the light burned. The guide rapped. A deep voice rumbled orders within, chairs scraped, a door slammed, and the door before which they stood was opened.

CHAPTER V

WILD BOB CAREW

MARTIN lurched forward past the man who opened the door into a room that was brightly lighted by gas and kerosene lamps. It was a room bare of furniture save for a common kitchen table, littered with charts and papers, and several kitchen chairs.

It was a large room, much larger than the one he had just quitted, the full width of the house, and, it seemed, part of a suite, for two doors, besides the one he entered through, let upon it, from the rear wall. But these details only impressed themselves upon Martin's mind later, and gradually. At the instant of his tempestuous entrance, he was entirely engrossed with his obsession, and he had eyes only for the dominant figure that stood behind the paper-littered table in the center of the room. To this man Martin addressed himself without preliminary.

"That woman—didn't you hear?" he cried. "These Japs have a woman prisoner in this house—a white woman! See! This is her cap. I saw——"

"Are you the messenger who was to come to me tonight?" interrupted the man addressed. He spoke in a commanding and vibrant bass voice.

It was suddenly borne in upon Martin's consciousness that he was in the presence of a personality. They were immobile yellow gargoyles, those two Japs who stood against the farther wall, they did not count. But this man who stood across the table from him—the air of the room was electric with his presence. A commanding and forceful personality, but a hostile personality, there was a chill in that interruption. But the momentum of his feelings carried Martin on.

"In the hall—shoving her along—she was struggling! A white girl! Those yellow——"

"What is your business with me?" The heavy voice beat down Martin's words. It was as if he had not spoken. "I am Captain Carew. You have a message for me?"

Martin checked his splutter of words. The other's sentences were like a dash of cold water; they cleared his mind. There was menace in that heavy voice, in the other's attitude, in the frosty gleam of his eyes. That veiled threat sobered Martin. He stood still and played his eyes upon the other in appraisal.

And he was a picture to fill the eye, this man who bore himself so disdainfully, this Captain Wild Bob Carew. Went glimmering the graceless, blasphemous sea-renegade of Martin's fancy. Martin caught his breath with unforced admiration as he measured the other's form and face.

Captain Carew was big and blond, as Smatt had predicted. He was also quite the handsomest man Martin had ever seen. He stood at least six feet, and was leanly and finely built. He was, perhaps, thirty-five years old, but the springiness of youth was still in his carriage.

Martin gained from him the impression of great physical strength. The face was finely chiseled, virile, aristocratic, a face to compel men's admiration, to turn women's heads. But Martin divined the flaw in that fine mask. The full, curved lips were shaded by a short, blond mustache, but that hirsute covering did not conceal the cruel quirk at the lips' corners. The face was ruddy, even in that light, and unlined. The eyes, probably blue in daylight, were black and glittering; and they bore Martin's scrutiny without a flicker. But after a moment the cruel lips curled scornfully.

"Well, my good fellow, have you quite finished with your inspection?" said Carew. "I hope you have discovered nothing about my appearance that displeases you."

The cavalier tone brought Martin to himself with a start. He had been taken aback by the appearance of Captain Carew, the man so different from his preconceived picture. This was no rough bully of the seas; Carew's bearing and dandified apparel bespoke gentility. Martin had just observed

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one of the captain's hands, a slender, white, aristocratic hand, small for the man's size. On the back of the hand was a star, tattooed in red.

The tattooing recalled Smatt and Smatt's words; recalled to Martin his reason for being in that room; banished for the moment his knight-errant mood. He thrust his hand into his inside overcoat pocket and felt of the envelope. Smatt's formula came to his lips.

"I wish to see you on the Hakodate business," he said.

"It is time that business was settled. Did the Chief send you?" Carew responded promptly.

"That is correct," said Martin.

He half withdrew the envelope from his pocket, and then hesitated. This Carew was a severe and superior person. The packet delivered, Martin foresaw instant dismissal. And that poor girl! Yet, Carew was a white man.

"But, Captain Carew, you could not have understood me aright!" he appealed. "I tell you, these Japanese have a young white woman——"

"Enough!" barked Carew. His tone made Martin jump. "Young man, you were sent here to deliver certain papers to me. Do so."

Silently, Martin handed over the envelope. He was baffled. He was angry.

"Now — get out!" commanded Carew, waving him toward the hall.

Martin turned toward the exit. Hot, edged words were on his tongue's tip, and he could not trust himself to further urge this cold-blooded wretch. He took a step toward the door and then stopped short, staring into the corner of the room. He saw a man's gray overcoat lying on the floor in the corner.

He wheeled upon Carew again and found the latter's eyes upon him in a threatening glare.

"You — you — that coat!" stammered Martin.

"Enough!" exclaimed Carew. "You have finished your business with me, young man. You will find your guide in the hall; he will conduct you to the street. And a word of advice, my good fellow: If you value your skin and your employment, you will promptly forget everything and anything you may have seen in this house!"

Martin choked upon his rage. Within him surged a hot hatred of this insolent sailor; this Captain of yellow bravos; this abductor of girls; this man who dared not face the daylight. He was a worm beneath the Captain's feet. He was—well, the worm could turn.

He moved toward the door. Yes, he would go, and quickly.

"If you value your skin and your employment!" So that was it—a threat! He would show this high-handed captain that Martin Blake would risk his skin as readily as the next man; and as for his employment —a fig for Smatt, and Dr. Ichi, and all their ilk! They were crooks; this Carew was a crook. They held that girl against her will. It was all a piece of some dirty, crooked work. Well, the police . . . .

"God, what treachery is this!"

The booming sentence arrested Martin at the door. He lifted his hand from the knob and turned to the voice. Carew, his face convulsed with passion, was regarding him.

"What does this mean?" cried Carew. He shook a handful of papers at Martin. "Come back here, you! Explain this beastly trick!"

Martin went back. He noticed, as he drew close to the other, that the envelope he had given the captain lay empty and torn on the table.

"Well, what is it? What trick?" he demanded shortly.

"What trick!" mimicked Carew. "Look here. Is this what you were to deliver to me?"

He thrust the sheaf of papers beneath Martin's nose. They were sheets of blank, white paper, and they had been creased by folding.

"This is what that precious envelope contained," continued Carew. "Tell me, what —— foolery is this? Where is that code translation? Where are my instructions Where are my clearance papers? Hey— you staring fool!"

"Stop that!" flared Martin. "You moderate your tone when you speak to me! If you have any complaint to make about the contents of that envelope, make them to Josiah Smatt, and that Dr. Ichi. I know nothing about the contents. The envelope was given to me sealed, and I delivered it to you sealed."

"It has been tampered with," declared Carew.

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"It has not," asserted Martin. "I have had it in my pocket, on my person, since Smatt gave it to me. I delivered it to you with the contents intact. If you found those blank sheets within, they were placed there before I received the enelope."

Carew favored Martin with a steely and searching stare; and Martin, ablaze with resentment, stared boldly back. Martin's bearing, and his positive statements, evidently impressed the captain.

"You had better take the matter up with the men who sent me here," said Martin. "I have finished with my part of the affair. I wish to go."

"You are jolly well right I'll take the matter up with the men who sent you here!" exclaimed Carew. "And I'll take the matter up at once. Meanwhile, you will remain here. I'll not lose track of you until I get to the bottom of this affair."

"Do you mean you intend to detain me here? Whether I will or no?" demanded the thoroughly angered Martin.

"I do," stated Carew.

He barked an order in a foreign tongue. The two gargoyles at the other end ofthe room sprang to life and started swiftly toward Martin.

Martin wheeled about and darted for the door to the hallway. He reached it, and was jerking it open, when the two Japs flung themselves upon him. He lifted one from his feet with a well-placed swing. The other flung his arms about Martin's neck and clung there.

Martin staggered into the hall, wrestling with that leach-like hug. He tore free from the fellow; and as he did he caught a glimpse of Captain Carew through the open door. The man had not moved from his station behind the table.

Then a mountain seemed to drop upon Martin's back. He was crushed face downward upon the floor, enveloped and smothered by a vast and sour-smelling bulk.

He struggled desperately and succeeded in partly rolling over on his back. He flailed his arm twice, and felt his fist strike against soft flesh. He saw hanging over him the unwholesome face of the saloonkeeper, Spulvedo.

Then a heavy blow smote his jaw-bone, and he went a-dancing through a world of bright, shooting stars, into darkness.

CHAPTER VI

PRISONER

THE RESULTS of a forceful tap on the human jaw are various. One man lies inert, dead of body, blank of mind; a second writhes about and babbles; a third retains a modicum of control over locomotion, but the mind journeys afar into a phantasmagoric world.

Martin was the third man during this, his first, reaction to a knockout blow. He was not completely unconscious, but that terrific jolt seemed to divorce body and mind. So far as further resistance was concerned, he was helpless. He swam about in an opaque mist. There, afar off, on the floor, was stretched another Martin Blake, a shadow of Martin Blake; and he saw monstrous things surrounding this adumbration of himself, headless bodies, and bodiless heads, and detached arms and legs.

He saw these parts of men haul the unreal Martin Blake to his feet and bundle him through the door, back into the big, lighted room. He saw this other self, body sagging, head hanging, stand again before the paper-littered table and sway to and fro upon tottering legs. He heard, from a great distance, the deep rumble of Captain Carew's voice—but all he could see of Carew was a foot and a section of leg. He saw a wide expanse of bare floor, and the floor was moving.

He hung suspended before a door. Came Carew's voice—

"Not there—fools—next room."

More moving floor. Another door. The door receded and showed a black hole. Again the deep voice—

"Good place—safe—just quill-pusher—dump."

A headlong flight through darkness, falling, falling, into the bottomless pit. A crash. And Martin's mind and Martin's body became one again as he struck the floor.

He was lying face downward upon a bare floor. He sat up. His head was ringing, and he could feel that his cheek was swelling. His addled wits slowly settled themselves. He moved his head about and took stock, as well as he could, of his new surroundings.

He retained a vague memory of his passage through the big room, and of the

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two doors. So, he knew the place he had been so unceremoniously dumped into was one of the rooms that opened upon Carew's headquarters. The only light that entered the place crept under the door from the room without. He knew, without experiment, the door was locked upon him.

The room felt bare. He struck one of his few remaining matches. The room was bare, not a stick of furniture in it. The single window was closed, and he supposed it was shuttered as well, for he could not see through it. But he would make sure.

He clambered to his feet, a bit dizzy yet but well able to control his movements. He moved softly toward the window, feeling his way.

In a second his hand touched the window-ledge. He felt along the sash and shoved upward. To his surprise, the window lifted easily. But the hand he shoved without met, as he expected it would, a heavy wooden shutter; and his investigating fingers disclosed, moreover, a padlock, that, by means of a staple sunk in the sill, locked the shutter fast. No hope of getting away through the window.

The certainty that he was imprisoned in this sealed box of a room was not soothing to Martin's temper. He was not frightened —he was angry. The haughty Carew had aroused in him resentment; now, he had been slugged semi-conscious and locked in this room. His anger reached the proportions of a rage, a hot, furious rage.

He left the window and crossed to the door. He did not try this time to soften his footfalls—he did not care who heard him.

He tried the door. Locked. He shook it, and rattled it. No response, but his straining ears caught the sound of light footfalls without.

He pounded upon the door, shouted threats, demands, challenges. He was in the mood to flog the whole vile brood of this Pension Spulvedo.

He resorted to the method that had brought him freedom once before that night—he lifted his foot and drove his boot against the door. And, as before, the response was immediate.

A peremptory voice was raised in the other room.

"Be quiet, you, een there! Eef you be not quiet, I feex you!"

A well-remembered voice! That greasy villain of a saloon-keeper was out there! It was Spulvedo who had smote him on the jaw. Martin redoubled his blows on the door.

"Stop! *Santa Maria*, eef you not stop, I shoot!"

Martin kicked away. The door, of flimsy enough construction, seemed on point of giving way. Then, there happened in such rapid sequence as to seem simultaneous, several things.

There was an ear-splitting crash, a splintering of wood, a hot streak passing so close to Martin's head it scorched, a tinkle of broken glass from the window behind him, a smell of burnt gunpowder.

Martin stood on one leg, like a stork, his free foot suspended for the kick he did not deliver. There was a queer sinking feeling in that inward organ that received his food. He stared at a little hole in the door panel, just above his head—a little bullet-hole that glowed yellow with the light from the other room. The man had shot through the door at him!

"Eef you not stop the keek, I shoot lower!" came the voice.

MARTIN sat down quickly upon the floor. Then, on second thought, he crawled into the nearest corner and crouched against the wall.

To be shot at, to have Death's hot breath scorch one's very hair, might very well daunt a person of more tumultuous antecedents than Martin Blake. To a young man whose chief occupation in life has been the warming of an office chair, such an experience is apt to prove unnerving. It spoke well of the stuff Martin was made of that he was not overly frightened. But Martin was certainly a bit shaken.

He suddenly discovered there was a vast difference between braving death in spirit in the pages of a book, and braving death in person in a locked upstairs room of a dubious and isolated boozing den. It was all very well for, say, Roger De Puyster, hero of that swanking tale "Death before Dishonor" to disregard such trifles as revolver shots and threats of death. But as for Martin Blake, law clerk, well, he squatted low and hugged close in his corner. No panic gripped him, but the instinct of self-preservation is a primal instinct. Martin's condition of mind, for the moment, was that bromidic state, "better imagined than described."

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Chiefly, he was astonished. He, Martin Blake, had at last encountered a real adventure! He, the obscure law clerk and messenger, whose existence was a drab routine, whose every act must favor dull convention, had suddenly tumbled into the meshes of a dark intrigue, undoubtedly unlawful, where men's violent passions were given free rein.

In the short space of a half-hour, he had witnessed an abduction, been assaulted, imprisoned, murderously shot at! These things had happened to him, to Mrs. Meagher's star boarder, to Martin Blake, the despised quill-pusher! There was in Martin's mood, as he crouched there in the corner, that transcended his anger, his wonder, his fear, something that was close akin to exhilaration.

It was very still. His thumping heart seemed to him to be the only sound that reached his straining ears.

What was going on out there in the big room? He had not heard Carew's voice. Was the captain still there? Was Spulvedo crouching without the door, pistol raised, waiting for him to "keek"? Where were the mysterious Japanese? What were they—Carew's men or Dr. Ichi's?

Strange thing about that envelop. Martin had been as much surprised as Carew at the contents. What kind of a game were Smatt and Ichi playing, sending him with injunctions of secrecy to deliver sheets of blank paper? Carew declared the envelop had been tampered with, but Martin knew better. It had not left his possession. Had Smatt foreseen the reception that would be accorded his messenger? He did not doubt it. Smatt was a cold-blooded fish; he would not hesitate to risk his clerk's skin if a dollar profit were in sight. Did Smatt and Ichi know about the abduction—the imprisonment of that girl who masqueraded in the gray overcoat?

Aye, the girl—that was the important thing! Who was she? Where had she been taken? If he could only get word to the police! He had no fears for himself, at least, not many. When Carew had adjusted the matter of the envelop with Smatt and Ichi, why, of course, he would be turned loose. But the woman—those yellow men. . . .

Martin's ears became suddenly aware of a faint, strange sound. It was a sound he had been endeavoring subconsciously to place during the period of his musing; he had almost identified it as his heart-beats. Now, alert and listening, he placed it. It was a tapping on the other side of the wall he leaned against, a light tap-tap-tap. It started, stopped, started.

Somebody was tapping on the wall in the next room. Another prisoner! It was the girl—of course, it was the girl.

Martin was instantly sure of the tapper's identity, with a sureness born of intuition and memory. He remembered the two doors opening from the big room, the gray overcoat lying in the corner, Carew's words when the semi-conscious Martin Blake was held poised before the other door. "Not there—next room." Those were Carew's words. Why, of course, the Japs had brought the girl to Carew, and he had shut her in the next room.

Tap-tap-tap, tap-tap. There it came again. Martin rapped against the wall with his own knuckles, paused, rapped again. Instantly came the response from the other side, the same number of raps. A plain answer.

But Martin's elation was short lived. The unseen tapper immediately commenced again, *tap-tap, tap-tap-tap-tap, tap.*

Surely there was method in that irregular tapping. A signal, a talk in code! But he could not read it. Nor dare he lift his voice in shouted communication through the wall—Spulvedo, and bullets, hung over him. One experience of being shot at while unarmed and helpless was sufficient. It would not help the girl for him to get himself shot.

The unevenly tapped message came again. The best he could do was repeat the taps. But this, evidently, did not satisfy the sender. The tapping on the other side ceased. Though he rapped till his knuckles were sore, he could not induce the other to recommence.

The gloom of the room was less dense, Martin's accustomed eyes being now able to discern all four walls and the outline of the window. A-fever with excitement as he was, the inactivity palled upon him, became unbearable. He must do something. Well, he would try the window again.

But first he crept to the door and endeavored to peer through the key-hole into the big room. He hoped to get a view of what was happening without, of Carew, of

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Spulvedo. But he was disappointed. The key, thrust in the lock on the outer side, completely barred any outlook. He pressed his ear against the door, but heard nothing.

A second later he was at the window, feeling of the padlocked shutter.

He drew his penknife from his pocket. It was a tiny, ridiculous blade, and it seemed futile to hope it would dig that stout staple out of the sill; still, thought Martin, any sort of attempt was better than no attempt.

He leaned over the sill and pecked away with his office tool. Of a sudden, a draft of cold, fresh air rushed up into his face. At the same instant, his other hand, which was leaning against the shutter, felt the shutter bulge slightly outward, and his ears caught a distinct, but not loud, scraping sound.

The sound increased, the bulge increased, the draft increased. Martin felt the staple that held the padlock bending, felt, also, the prying edge of a small steel bar between the sill edge and the shutter. Some one was outside, breaking entrance!

He drew to one side, shrinking against the wall, instinctively holding his breath. The prying of the shutter from without steadily continued. Conjectures and hopes surged through his mind—it was a burglar, it was the police, it was some unknown, unguessed friend. He didn't care who it was so long as the shutter was opened.

His heart beat a bass-drum solo against his ribs. There were distinct, rasping creaks from the window sill—the staple was groaning at being hauled from its wooden bed. There was a sharp crack, and the shutter swung open. Martin heard a relieved grunt, felt the cool, fresh air enveloping him, and saw a square of black sky, lighted with a few stars.

A hand grasped the window-sill and slid along it. Martin stared at the hand, fascinated. It seemed no more than a writhing shadow.

Then a head abruptly bobbed into the square of uncertain light. It was a familiar head; even against that dark background Martin recognized it promptly; it was an unusually large head, surmounted by a ridiculously small hat. A well remembered voice reached Martin's ear in a guarded whisper:

"Miss Ruth, Miss Ruth! Are you there, Miss Ruth?"

It was the hunchback, Little Billy.

MARTIN'S long-held breath exploded with a sudden pop. The hunchback stiffened at the sound and hung motionless, half over the sill. He peered into the dark room evidently endeavoring to locate the noise.

"Miss Ruth?" he hissed sharply.

Martin stepped from the wall towards the window.

"It is I," he commenced.

"Stop! Don't move, don't yell. I have you covered!" was Little Billy's sharp injunction; and Martin caught the gleam of steel in the other's hand, saw the muzzle of a revolver pointed at his chest.

"No, no, don't shoot!" he exclaimed. "It is I, Martin Blake, the law clerk. Don't you remember—the fellow who was talking to you by the fire hydrant."

"The law clerk! Good Lord! Have they shanghaied you?"

"Yes, I'm locked in this room," said Martin. "They are guarding the door. That fellow, Spulvedo, just took a shot at me because I tried to break out. Don't speak loudly—they'll overhear."

"I'm coming in," whispered Little Billy.

He wriggled his body further over the sill, swung about and dropped to the floor by Martin's side. Immediately, he turned and thrust his head out of the window and spoke a few words in an undertone to some one below.

Martin leaned over Little Billy's shoulder and peered out. He discovered the means by which the hunchback had reached that second story window—about nine feet below was the roof of a shed that abutted against the side of the building, and on the farther side of the shed was a dark space that looked like an alley, a freight entrance probably to the great brick warehouse that reared its blank, windowless side just opposite. He saw that his previous surmise had been correct—this room he had been confined in was a rear room, the shed below was doubtless an outhouse of the saloon, the street yonder was Green Street.

Martin grasped these details at a glance. What really interested him at the moment was a man's figure just below him on the roof of the shed. The upturned face was but a few feet distant; the man bulked huge in the shadow. It was the boatswain. Martin divined the method of the hunchback's assault upon the shutters—he had evidently stood upon the giant's shoulders.

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"Stand by, Bos," called Little Billy softly. "I'm inside, all right."

"Aye, aye," came the answering rumble. "'Ave you found 'er, lad? 'Oo's that lookin' over your shoulder?"

"It is that clerk," said Little Billy. "'Wild Bob' locked him up. No, she isn't——"

He straightened up and clutched Martin's arm.

"You in here alone?" he demanded. "I am looking——"

"I know—a girl," interrupted Martin excitedly. "I think she is in the next room. A white girl. The Japs caught her and turned her over to Carew. Had on a man's gray overcoat, and——"

"Did you see her? Is she safe?"

"Think so. They haven't had time to harm her. I think she is in the next room. Some one was rapping on the wall."

"Code talk!" supplemented the hunchback. "That is Ruth. She thinks I was caught, too. She has been trying to communicate with me. Must have heard them put you in here. Which wall?"

He darted to the side of the room Martin indicated, moving lightly and soundlessly. He started a light tapping on the wall, the same irregular tapping that had puzzled Martin a few moments before. Hardly had he begun when faint replies came from the next room.

Martin tiptoed to the door and pressed his ear against it. Events were crowding him swiftly. He had no time or data for cool reasoning. The boatswain, the hunchback, the imprisoned woman, Carew, the envelop, Ichi and Smatt—it was all a mysterious jumble that he had no time to bother with. His impulse controlled him, and his impulse enlisted him upon the girl's side against Carew. Little Billy and the boatswain he accepted without question as friends. Had they not opened the window, and the way to freedom? So he listened at the door while the hunchback exchanged signals, alert for alarming sounds from the big room. But he heard nothing.

For several moments the strange conversation continued through the wall. Twice, Martin heard the hunchback mutter an oath. Then, after a final series of raps, the little man left the wall and crept to Martin's side.

"Yes, she is in there," he announced. "We will have to work swiftly. What do you know of this house—how constructed?"

Martin described in whispers the plan of the building as he knew it—the hall and stairs, the large room, the two smaller rooms opening off it. He also told Little Billy of his own rough experience, though he did not mention the envelop.

"Spulvedo is on guard on the other side of this door," he concluded. "He is armed, and he won't hesitate to shoot."

"I know he would shoot," said Little Billy grimly. "So will I shoot, if necessary. You have been thrust into a desperate business, my friend. Oh, I understand your position, even better than you, yourself. I know why you were seized and locked in here. I warn you truly, you are in some danger. Carew, or any of his crowd, would snuff you out in an instant if he thought fit. I am not going to ask you to risk your skin in an affair that does not concern you. There is the window—the bosun will let you pass."

"I'll stay and help you, if you'll have me," promptly replied Martin. "I am not afraid to take a chance. And that girl—those yellow——"

"I knew you would stick!" interrupted the hunchback. His hand grasped Martin's in a congratulatory grip. "I knew I had not misjudged you—you are a white man. We must get her away, and we dare not call the police into this affair. But there is nothing crooked on our side, of the fence. Here, take this—you may need it!"

Little Billy thrust something into Martin's hand, and Martin thrilled at the feel of it. It was a pistol, a compact, automatic messenger of death. But once or twice before had Martin ever handled such a weapon, and he had never shot one at a living mark. Nevertheless, it fitted snugly and naturally into his palm. He even contemplated, with a certain amount of pleasure, its instant use upon the dive-keeper's gross person. There was a subtle and lasting change of character in that brief moment—Martin Blake, law clerk, became of the dead past, and Martin Blake, adventurer, stepped into the law clerk's boots.

"It is too risky to make a rush through this door," Little Billy was saying. "They would hear us and be on guard. We will try the next window."

He darted to the window, and Martin followed. The purposeful hunchback was a stimulating surprise, a far cry from the

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eloquent Little Billy of the fire hydrant to the energetic Little Billy of the moment! The man of words become the man of action.

Little Billy leaned out of the window, and whispered.

"Aye, aye," Martin heard the hoarse whisper in reply.

"Stand by we are coming out—both of us," admonished Little Billy.

He vaulted over the sill, clung a moment, and dropped. Martin saw the boatswain catch the little man in midair and lower him gently to his feet.

"Come on," the hunchback then called softly.

Martin divested himself of his overcoat. The cause, he thought, was worth the sacrifice, and the garment was cumbersome. Then he clambered over the sill and lowered himself.

He was preparing to drop, when a resistless clutch fastened upon his hips. He was handed through the air as if he were a feather, and set gently upon his feet at Little Billy's side. The boatswain's gruff whisper was in his ear—

"Swiggle me, ladibuck, I 'ad no thought to run afoul of you again."

"Come on—next window," commanded Little Billy.

He shrank against the side of the building and began to edge himself along. Martin and the boatswain followed. Martin looked up. The window they had just climbed through was a mere black blot, the window that was their objective was a mere outline overhead and a few feet to one side. No betraying light hazarded them, there on the shed. The warehouse behind them, and the building against which they crouched, combined to drape them in black shadow. Unless they made a noise, Martin divined there was not much chance of their being discovered.

Little Billy paused beneath the other window, and Martin and the boatswain pressed close to his side.

"Now, bosun, lend me your shoulders," said Little Billy. "If this shutter is fastened the same way the other one was, we won't have much trouble. Hand me the bar."

The boatswain produced a short steel bar from some place about his person and handed it to the hunchback. Then he braced his back against the building, directly below the desired window, and picking up Little Billy, hoisted the little fellow to his own broad shoulders. The hunchback perched there a moment and delivered instructions to Martin.

"You stand lookout," he instructed. "Watch the street. Listen for footsteps."

Martin obediently crept to the edge of the shed's roof that overlooked the street and posted himself there as watchman. The alley was on his left hand, but it was so dark there he could not see the ground. The street, just before him, was not so impervious to peering eyes.

The cobblestones and the sidewalk pavement gleamed dully. By stretching his neck, he could see the corner where the street lamp spluttered before the saloon entrance, and beyond the corner, the wide vista of the Embarcadero and a section of dark wharf. But he saw nothing threatening in the scene. Nothing moved—the street was empty of life. The only sounds were the hooting of steamboat whistles on the bay and the light rattle of Little Billy's bar against the shutter.

Then, abruptly, came from around the corner, in front of the saloon, the muffled throb of an automobile engine. It sank to a purr, and stopped. Martin stiffened tensely and gripped the revolver in his hand. Behind him, he heard the boatswain mutter:

"'Ear that, Billy? Swiggle me, 'e's back —'urry!"

The scraping sound of the steel bar upon the shutter increased in volume. Martin heard a mumble of voices, and a stamping of feet on the pavement. Then a door closed and the sounds ceased. Martin knew that several men had entered the saloon. The danger seemed to have passed them by.

He heard Little Billy give vent to a satisfied grunt. He looked up, over his shoulder, and saw that the jimmy had completed its task. The shutter was open, Little Billy was clambering down from the boatswain's shoulders, an indistinct figure was half over the sill, clambering out of the newly opened window. And in the same glance, he saw a beam of yellow light illumine the other window, the window of the room in which he had been prisoner. His ears were assailed with a sudden outcry coming through that window—

"He ees gone!"

It happened in the twinkling of an eye.

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Martin wheeled about at the sight and sound. He had no time for reflection, but he knew instantly that his escape had been discovered, that the light above came from the big room where he had bearded Carew, that they had opened the door and found him gone.

Feet trampled in the room. A man's figure was framed in the lighted window—a bloated bulk that he knew was Spulvedo. A flame shot from that figure into his very face. The missile struck the roof close to his side and splattered shingle and dirt in his face. Without hesitation, he straightened his own arm and fired point blank at the living mark. Spulvedo emitted a stifled shriek and fell from sight.

The window was empty again. Not until long afterward did Martin recall that his conscious mind never received the sound of those two shots.

A dark figure brushed past him and dropped over the edge of the roof to the street. The boatswain followed. Little Billy was by his side, grasping his shoulder.

"Come on—roll off!" the hunchback was urging.

The second window overhead was suddenly alight, and a booming voice was cursing in the room. Martin rolled off the edge and fell into the boatswain's arms.

Then he was on his feet, running, by the boatswain's side. Just in front of him raced the hunchback, and a queer figure in man's clothes, whose long hair streamed behind. He heard men shouting.

They passed the corner and started across the Embarcadero toward the wharves. Far down the street a police whistle was blowing shrilly. Behind them, the Black Cruiser was spewing forth its brood.

The street was wide. They were not nearly across when these sounds of pursuit reached Martin's ears. He heard the pounding of feet behind him, and the sound of shots. He heard the hunchback fling over his shoulder:

"Hold them back, bos! We'll get the boat free!"

The boatswain stopped short and wheeled about. Martin's momentum carried him several steps farther, then he too checked his stride. Intuitively, he knew his place was at the boatswain's side.

The boatswain was on one knee, shooting rapidly at a cluster of retreating figures, The Black Cruiser was still emptying itself. Everywhere before the saloon, it seemed to Martin, were darting forms.

From behind telegraph poles, from kneeling figures, came the spurting flames of revolver shots. The reports were a sharp rattle. Martin dropped to his knee and raised his arm. The gun in his hand leaped like a live thing as he pulled the trigger. He was given entirely over to the battle lust of the moment. He was cool, he was happy, he laughed aloud, and he shot rapidly, with intent to kill, at the enemy figures yonder.

The police whistles sounded insistently, more shrilly. Martin sensed there was a commotion a block or so down the street—approaching police, he knew.

The boatswain was on his feet and backing toward the dock. His voice warned Martin—

"Avast there, nipper!"

Martin found his feet also and commenced to retreat. One of the enemy figures was coming straight for them, ignoring the shots. There was something distinctive, contemptuous, about that charge. Martin knew the approaching figure was Carew. He took aim, crooked his finger, and found his weapon empty. He drew back his arm and hurled the gun straight at the other, and at the same instant the charging man shot. And darkness enveloped Martin as he fell.

CHAPTER VII

THE MATE OF THE BRIG *COHASSET*

MARTIN returned to consciousness gradually, and *via* the nightmare route. He was being put to torture. He was bound, helpless, and a steel band encircled his head, and sharp spikes were probing his brain.

He was surrounded by gibbering and leering slant-eyed yellow faces; they screamed at him without let-up, and his ears rang with their fiendish outcry. But mingled with, and woven into, that barbarous howl was a softer and friendlier note, at which his groping wits clutched eagerly; it was a clear, musical chant, and somehow, it soothed his hurts, and gave him courage to face his torturers. The yellow faces grimaced horridly at him. He was being roughly rolled about. So, he opened his eyes.

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He was staring upward at the bare, wooden bottom-side of a bunk. It was a long moment before he could identify that blank expanse. Then he discovered that he was lying in a bunk, and there was something the matter with his couch, it bounced about, and his feet were, as often as not, higher than his head.

He was in a room. Just before his eyes was a little round window in the wall, and through it filtered a feeble daylight when his feet were ascendant, and when his head was uppermost he glimpsed racing, green water on the other side of the thick glass circle. It was strangely unaccountable.

His eyes roved. The mists were clearing somewhat from his mind. He was in a room, yes, the queerest little cubby-hole he had ever seen. There was a lamp in a rack against the wall, and the lamp remained stationary and upright while the wall behind it reeled drunkenly.

Clothes dangled from pegs as if inhabited by dancing ghosts. Somewhere, crockery rattled. There was an alarming creaking, as if great timbers were grinding together. And there was, over all, a shrill, menacing, unceasing howl—the same dread sounds that had made part of his dream.

Also persisted the singing voice that had drawn him safely out of his marish visions. His eyes, continuing their sweep, passed by a tiny desk, a rack of books, a swinging wash-basin, and encountered the source of that musical chant. The hunchback, Little Billy, was seated crosslegged upon the floor, sewing on some piece of wearing apparel, and, as he deftly plied the needle, he crooned his ditty in the pure tenor that had before charmed Martin.

"A-roving, a-roving,
Since roving's been my ru-u-in——"

So far he got, when he looked up and saw Martin's eyes fixed upon him. He promptly threw his work aside, leaped to his feet and bent over the bunk. His impish, friendly face was wreathed in a cordial smile.

"Why, hello, old scout! Had your sleep out? How do you feel?" was his cheerful greeting.

Martin had been fully occupied in receiving impressions during the few moments he had been awake, and until Little Billy spoke, he had not considered himself. But at the other's words, he suddenly discovered that something was the matter with his body. He was sick. His head hurt, and something terrible was happening to his inner man — he was ascending to great heights only to drop swiftly to great depths. It was his stomach, his stomach was performing a rapid and continuous journey between his throat and the soles of his feet. He ached all over. He felt it was the end; it was approaching dissolution.

"My inside—my stomach. I'm dying!" he managed to gasp.

Little Billy's elfish grin grew wider. The wretch even chuckled as he contemplated Martin's misery.

"Oh, that is nothing," Martin heard him say. "Just a little bout with our old friend Mister Mal de Mer. You'll be all right once you get on your feet and get some warm food inside of you. How is the head?"

The mention of food was nauseous, but the remark anent the head acquainted him with a new ill. He touched the place where his hair should have been, and instead of hair his hand caressed a bandage. He discovered that beneath the bandage was the seat of the throbbing pain that bothered him. Also, memory began to stir in the chaos of his mind—head bandaged, street fight, Black Cruiser, shots.

"What—what," he stuttered.

"You were shot," Little Billy replied to that interrogatory stare. "The bosun picked you up and carried you to the boat, and we brought you aboard with us. You were creased. The narrowest squeak I ever saw. The bullet just plowed over your skull. We thought at first you were gone—fractured skull, you know—but you came out of your trance and fell asleep. You have been lying in that bunk for about fifteen hours. It is mid-afternoon now, and we have been to sea since midnight."

"T-to sea!" gasped Martin.

The hunchback's matter-of-fact announcement fairly took his breath. The latter's chuckle became more pronounced at Martin's blank amazement.

"Yes, my legal friend, you have invaded the troublous domains of old King Nep.," he continued genially. "As the bosun remarked this morning, when a few playful tons of H_2O rolled him along the main deck, ' 'Ere we are, swiggle me stiff, safe and sound at sea again!' " Little Billy struck an oratorical pose, and declaimed musically:

"O, we're running free, with a gale abaft,
And we're bound for the End o' the World!"

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"But—why did you bring—" mumbled Martin.

"We had to fetch you along," interrupted Little Billy. "If the bosun had left you behind, those yellow devils would have finished you, or else the police would have nabbed you. The police were at our heels when we made the getaway from the wharf, as it was. By Jove! It was for your own benefit we shanghaied you—you realize, don't you, that a street fight with guns in a civilized town like Frisco, with wounded, perhaps dead, men lying around, makes a rather serious business. But don't you worry any about the future. Everything is rosy. We are safe at sea, and booming along with a gale at our backs. The law may have gobbled up Wild Bob Carew and his crew—hope it did, but suspect my haughty captain squirmed out of it as he usually does. We have made our getaway, anyhow."

At sea! Disturbing visions were dancing through Martin's mind. At sea!

It was one thing to stand in an office window, idly watching passing ships, and longing to be at sea. It was quite another thing to awaken without foreknowledge, in a stuffy and careening berth, on a strange ship that was plowing through a storm, possessed of a wounded head and a gadabout stomach, and be informed casually by a grinning gnome that he was fleeing the law—that he had been kidnapped so he would avoid the consequences of a wild and deadly street brawl.

A man accustomed to rough buffets and fickle fortune might well blink his eyes over such a situation. To Martin, the clerk, to whose law-abiding existence both fights and police had hitherto been strangers, the information was more than a shock. It was an earthquake. His world was tumbling about his ears.

The jolt galvanized him to action. He sat up in his bunk and swung his legs over the side. For a second he had some wild idea of rushing forth, and somehow stepping ashore, and back into yesterday. Then he steadied himself.

"But what will I do?" he demanded of the hunchback. "Where are you going? I am not a sailor, I am a clerk—and my job——"

"My friend," said Little Billy, "I think you may definitely assume that your connection with the legal profession is severed. Your job is close on two hundred miles astern. But as I told you a moment since, you need not worry about your future. Why, you have already been adopted into the happy family—you are already one of the jolly company of the brig *Cohasset*, with equal rights, and an equal share. And if we have decent luck with this job ahead of us, you will have no cause to grieve at being yanked out of your berth ashore. It isn't so bad, is it? We know you leave no family behind—oh, yes, we know quite a lot about you, Martin Blake, we had to look you up—and I think you will be blessing us in a day or two for prying you out of your rut. You are the right sort. You were never cut out for a clerk! By Jove! You should hear the bosun tell how you bowled over Carew, himself, with your empty gun! You are a nervy one, all right. I'll wager this business ahead of us will be more to your liking than the one you leave behind."

"What is it?" asked Martin. "Where are you going?"

"Not my story—I can't tell you, now," answered Little Billy. "You'll find out tonight, after supper. There will be a powwow in the cabin, and the Old Man and Miss Ruth will enlighten you then."

"Miss Ruth!" echoed Martin, thinking for the first time of the girl who had innocently got him into this mess. "That is the girl! Then we got the girl safely."

"Oh, yes, she is aboard, and safe enough. She dressed your head—neat job of bandaging she does. Well, Blake, I'll have to be about my duties. I'm steward, you know. This is my room. You are to bunk with me. I would advise you to get up on deck if you can manage it. There is no cure for seasickness like being on your feet in fresh air. Don't worry about your head—it is only a flesh wound, and it will heal in a couple of days. And after supper you'll hear all about it. So long."

The door closed behind the sprightly little figure, and Martin was left alone.

Alone, but with thoughts enough for company. He sat there with his legs swinging over the side of the bunk, nursing his sore head and trying to digest the information Little Billy had imparted.

He was troubled, yet somehow not depressed. His coward fears of a few moments ago were gone, and he could face the situation now with considerable aplomb. Of course, it was disturbing to learn that

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he was probably a fugitive from justice; and with his knowledge of the law he could very well appreciate the probably serious consequences of last night's affair. Why, there were likely dead men in the city morgue as a result, and old Smatt, judging himself betrayed by his clerk, might swear him a murderer. He was a vindictive old man, Martin knew. And Spulvedo—he knew he had shot Spulvedo; he had seen the man drop.

Martin felt a qualm at that remembrance—shooting a man was a new and terrible experience, and his conscience had scruples concerning the sanctity of human life. If Martin Blake could then have seen a few months into the future. . . .

Yet he had no regrets for the part he had played. He had been headstrong, he knew, in so unreservedly joining forces with the strange people of this strange ship. But what else could he have done and retained his self-respect? A man, by George, owed it to himself to be willing to fight for a woman in distress—especially such a good-looking girl as this mysterious Miss Ruth. Little Billy, and these people, seemed to be at outs with the police, but he knew he was on the right side.

And so he was one of the jolly company of the brig *Cohassett* This craft seemed to have been fated to enter his life. He recalled how interested he had been when the boatswain first mentioned the name, last night, in Johnny Feiglebaum's. Last night! Why, it seemed a year ago! "Happy ship," the boatswain had called her, and Little Billy had referred to the "happy family." A queer outfit he had fallen in with. Well, at least he would see that "blessed, bleedin' little mate," the boatswain was so exercised about.

Brig *Cohassett* What kind of a ship was a brig, anyway? He would see.

Arrived at this conclusion, Martin felt better. He rolled clear of the bunk and balanced himself on the swaying floor. He was going to take the hunchback's advice and look over this new home of his, and take the tonic prescribed for his peripatetic stomach. Already, he felt much better. He even contemplated food without disgust.

He had been undressed, and he discovered his clothes hanging on the wall. While he donned them, his spirits continued to mount. He was done with fright and worry.

Things were not so bad. It was true there was no one ashore to grieve at his disappearance, save good Mrs. Meagher. But how in the world did the hunchback discover that fact? Come what might, he was done with his old drab life, done with musty legal forms, done with the job he so loathed. There was a jubilant tinge to his thoughts. Why, he was just where he had so often longed to be—"Out There where Things happened!"

That all-pervading screaming that rang in his ears—why, that was the wind whistling through the rigging, overhead, the storm king's brazen voice that he had so often dreamed of hearing. And that disconcerting lurching beneath his feet—why, that was the heaving deck he had so lusted to press foot upon.

What matter if it did play havoc with his midriff. That would pass; already he was feeling fit. Now he would go out and get acquainted with his shipmates—ah, shipmates! He smacked his lips over the word. Already he knew the hunchback and the boatswain—fine fellows. And the girl—he had seen her once and would never forget her face. That shining mass of hair . . .

And Martin laved himself in the basin, spruced himself before the little glass, and let himself out of the room.

MARTIN stepped into the ship's cabin. He knew it was the cabin, because he had often read passages descriptive of just such a room.

There were several doors on either side. They led to the berths. There was the curve of the ship's stern in the after wall, portholes, and a divan which followed the half-round. Chairs, a large table, swinging lamps, a skylight overhead. There was the companion ladder, leading to the deck above.

He made for the ladder. At its base he stopped. Some one was descending. A hale, white-bearded, rosy-cheeked old man came down from the deck. He had a serene and smiling countenance.

Martin waited expectantly, with half-extended hand. This must be the "Old Man" of the hunchback's reference. But the old man's wide-open eyes stared over his head, or through him. He walked past within a foot of Martin and gave not the least indication that he noticed Martin's presence. A second later he disappeared through a door on the farther side of the room.

Martin's hand dropped to his side. He

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was nonplused and somewhat piqued. It was unbelievable that he had been unseen. Why, the man had passed within touching distance and had looked straight at him! If this were the captain of the jolly brig . . .

However, just now he was eager to reach outdoors. He mounted the ladder and found himself in a box-like hatch. He thrust aside a canvas flap and stepped out on deck.

A blast of cold wind slapped his face and almost took his breath for a moment. He was facing aft, looking out over the stern of the ship, and his eyes beheld a tumbling chaos, a fearsome waste of leaping waters.

In the foreground of this picture, just across the skylight from him, stood the man at the wheel. He was an integrant feature of that wild scene, felt Martin. In Heaven's name, what manner of outlander was he? Squat and bulky in oilskins, broad-faced, high-cheeked, brown-colored, his forehead was tattooed, and ridges of horrible scars disfigured both plump cheeks. His eyes were small, feral; he gave Martin a fleeting, incurious glance, and turned his attention to his work. He stood impassive, clutching the wheel-spokes.

The deck was wet and slippery. The ship lunged down the slope of a sea, and Martin slid to leeward. He fought his way up-deck again and grasped the side of the hatch for support. The mishap had turned him about. He now faced forward, and the wheelman was forgotten.

He was on the poop, and he overlooked the length of the ship. The brig *Cohasset* was before his eyes, as much of her as was above water. But, as a matter of fact, and as he was later informed, he did not look upon a brig at all; the *Cohasset* was a brig only by virtue of sailors' loose habits of speech. She was in truth "a rig what ye rarely see, lad, a proper brigantine, a craft what I'll be swiggled stiff if ye can mate 'er anyw'ere for sailing and comfort."

But nice distinctions of rig did not bother Martin on this, his first, view of his new home. He was looking through his landsman eyes.

He saw, over the break of the poop, a sweep of deck that careened till the lee rail dipped, and green seas lolloped aboard and swirled, foam-flecked, aft. He saw the long jib-boom, now stabbing the leaden sky, now plunging into the depths. He saw the pyramid of bellying canvas on the foremast, the great foresail, the topsails, and the bare spars above.

He saw the great boom above his head, and the vast expanse of the mainsail, a tremendous canvas, even though reefed. He saw the straining, boardlike staysails. He heard the harsh scream of the wind aloft, the vibrant thrumming of tautened stays, the banging of a block, the crash of boarding seas. Grim sounds, and an outlook to daunt a young man whose maritime experience consisted of an occasional ferry-boat trip.

Martin was aghast. The ship was a chip in a maelstrom, lost, tossed about, sport of those monster waves. The ticklish game of "carrying on" was beyond Martin's present ken. He was thinking in the terms of his favorite literature. He was awestruck by the fury of the elements, by the limitless expanse of upheaving waters, by the long, white-crested seas racing down the wind. He was beholding the raging main!

"Hello, Mr. Blake! Glad to see you about. Nice little puff we have had for a starting boost — about blown out, I'm afraid."

The words, rich, throaty, tinged with amusement, came down the wind to Martin's ears. Martin turned his head. Opposite him on the sloping weather deck, regarding him with a smile, stood the girl—"Miss Ruth."

Martin stared. Had he heard aright, "little puff?" This battle of wind and wave a little puff! And she who regarded this cataclysmic scene with such contempt—that brave and confident figure, swaying so easily to the deck's reel, that bizarre costume, that sparkling face—was she the distressed maid he had fought for the night before? Yes, he remembered that vivid, expressive face. By George, she was a beauty!

She was, without doubt, an uncommonly pretty girl, and the strange costume she wore accentuated, rather than hid, her charms. A serge skirt came but little below her knees, and beneath it Martin saw feet and ankles encased in stout, trim, absurdly small sea boots.

She wore a sailor's pea-coat, open at the front and disclosing a guernsey covering a swelling bosom. The great mass of dark hair Martin remembered so well was knotted and piled atop her head, and a blue, peaked cap perched saucily aslant the mass.

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Her face was alive, vivacious. The eyes were large, dark, bright, the lips were ripe and smiling, the cheeks weather-bronzed but not swarthy.

Martin drank in the details of her appearance greedily, and they left him tongue-tied. Yes, by George, she was a beauty! Her carriage was regal, and there was about her an air of competence, of authority. She was not disturbed by her surroundings—she laughed. What had she called the storm? A puff! She seemed, by George, like a sprite of the storm! Like the steersman yonder, she seemed to belong to this setting of laboring ship and tumultuous sea. Here she came toward him with hand outstretched.

She walked easily, body inclining gracefully to the ship's whims, disdaining aid of skylight or hatch. Martin clung to the hatch with one hand and extended his other.

He thrilled to the warm clasp she gave him. He glowed at the friendly light in her eyes. She was tall, taller than she looked at a distance, almost as tall as he. She did not seem to raise her voice, yet her words reached him distinctly above the howl of the wind. He had to shout his answers.

"How does your head feel?" were her first words.

He answered reassuringly, and remembered of a sudden that it was those brown, shapely fingers that wrapped the bandage.

"I am Ruth Le Moyne," she continued. "I would like to thank you for what you did last night. You were splendid! Little Billy has told us how promptly you volunteered your aid, when you knew it meant danger to yourself. It was brave of—oh, words are so tame! But you can guess what it meant to me — I, a girl, and Carew——"

Yes, Martin knew. He hastened to shout that he knew. The girl's attitude made him uncomfortable. He shouted that he knew all about it, and that it was nothing, really nothing. He would like to do it again; he was really glad to be at sea on such a jolly little ship; the bump on his head was nothing; no, his seasickness was past; what he had done was nothing, by George, not worth mentioning!

So he said, while he held Ruth Le Moyne's hand and looked into her eyes—dark brown eyes, he noticed, not bright now, but misty with gratitude—and he meant what he said.

"Of course, you feel strange and lost," she said. "But you will get quickly used to ship life, and I know you will like it. You know, we call ourselves the 'happy family.' You are one of us, now. You share in the venture, and if we are successful—but you will hear all about it after awhile."

She broke off abruptly, looked aloft, then turned to the helmsman.

"Watch your eye, Oomak!" she called.

The savage-appearing steersman inclined his head submissively and pulled upon the wheel spokes. Martin stared, surprised. What had this entrancing bundle of femininity to do with the steering of the ship?

She turned to him again.

"We are losing the breeze," she said regretfully. "I suppose, though, we shouldn't complain. We have gained a good offing."

Losing the breeze!

"Do you mean—is the storm passing?" asked Martin.

"The storm?" She stared, then smiled. "Oh, yes—see!"

Martin looked up. Rifts of blue sky showed in the leaden blanket overhead. But the sea seemed as wild, his ear sensed no decrease in the wind's howl. This girl seemed very sure.

"I'll set the t'gal'n's'l and shake a reef out of the mains'l at eight bells," she continued. "Just a few moments of the time, now. You know, we are cracking on."

"Oh—of course," said Martin blankly. He didn't know just what she was talking about, but the salty words rolled off her tongue very glibly. "W-what are you on the ship, Miss——"

"Oh, I forgot that you didn't know," laughed the girl. "Why, I am the mate."

The mate! This radiant, laughing creature the mate! This slip of a girl! Oh, ho, no wonder the boatswain wept and spoke of posies, and the hunchback waxed poetical in description. This girl . . .

Martin suddenly gulped. He remembered the prim, mutton-chopped little man of his imaginings, the gentle, senile little mate of the brig *Cohasset*. He winced and blushed at the recollection of his idle thoughts. But a woman for mate! Why—and he stared about him—this girl must be in practical command of the ship. His life, the lives of those oilskin-clad figures he saw lounging forward, all the lives on the ship, were in her hand, dependent upon her skill. Mate! He had never heard—

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"You seem rather surprised," she rallied him. "I see disapproval in your face. But I assure you, I am a very good mate. I even have a master's ticket."

Martin stuttered in his confusion and tangled himself in a web of denial. Then came a blessed interruption. Up through the companion hatch, to which he still clung, arose a white head, and then the man. It was the serene-faced old man who had passed him by in the cabin.

"The captain!" announced the beskirted mate. "Captain, here is Mr. Blake—Mr. Blake, meet Captain Dabney."

The old man stepped out on deck and turned his head about uncertainly. His hand wandered an instant, and then met Martin's. His face wreathed in a cordial smile.

"Glad to meet you, lad," he said.

Martin found himself without words. He was fascinated by the captain's eyes, those serene, blue eyes that stared at him without seeing him. Captain Dabney was blind.

CHAPTER VIII

AROUND THE CABIN TABLE

MARTIN lounged upon the divan, on edge with impatience, his attention divided between the faces of his companions and the face of the clock hanging on the forward bulkhead. The two big lamps, upright in their gimbals, shed a warm, bright glow about the cabin.

The supper remains had disappeared. Little Billy was completing his steward's task by spreading over the table the damask cloth that graced the board between meals. The blind captain sat in a chair, quietly puffing a pipe. The clock showed a quarter of eight. At eight o'clock, eight bells would strike overhead, the bosun would relieve the mate, the mate would come below, and then his burning curiosity was promised satisfaction.

The mate! Martin's thoughts buzzed around the girl like a moth around a candle-flame. Not yet could he reconcile Ruth with her duties as ship's first officer. It seemed so absurd. She and the giant bosun divided the watches between them. What an ill-assorted brace! And she was the superior. She was the right arm, and the eyes of the old blind man. Oh, she was a proper sailor, right enough!

Yes, she had set the t'gal'n's'l and shaken the reef out of the mains'l. He knew now what she had meant.

What a superb figure she was, standing there on the windswept deck, singing her orders. Yes, singing—that full, contralto *halloo* of hers was naught but a song. And how the wild men of the crew had leaped to obey! Wild men—he had seen but few white faces forward—wild islanders of some sort.

He would never forget his first dogwatch, spent by the boatswain's side, pacing the poop deck. How niftily he had gained his sea legs! He had easily learned the trick of throwing his body to meet the ship. He had learned lots, besides, from the deep voice rumbling in his ear.

"A smart little 'ooker lad, and a smart crew, all married to 'er. Swiggle me! Ain't many 'er size can show 'er a pair o' 'eels. Ay, small, but big enough for 'er work—'undred thirty ton. Great trader, the Old Man is. 'Square Jim' Dabney, 'e's called, from the Arctic to 'Obart Town, and across Asia side; except them Rooshuns—they call 'im the 'Slippery Devil.' Says I, fine 'auls we've 'ad, seal and fur, from them Rooshuns.

"Blast o' dynamite, lad, took the Old Man's sight. Fine 'aul this time if we 'ave luck. Swiggle me stiff, it'll set us up ashore for bleeding toffs! . . . ye'll 'ear about it later. . . . Ay, that's the royal, lad—topmost spar—be shakin' that rag out afore long. . . . Ay, mate, and a proper fine mate she is, bless 'er bleeding little 'eart! Grew up at sea—proper shark for navigation—Old Man never 'ad 'er 'ead for figures. . . . See—them's the 'alyards, lad! . . . Ay, prime sailorman, she is, too. . . ."

Such was the burden of the boatswain's discourse throughout the dogwatch. A shark for navigation, and a prime sailorman, bless her bleeding little heart! Oh, she was the apple of the boatswain's eye! And of other eyes. And the boatswain had called her "mister" when he came on deck—

" 'Ow's she going, mister?"

She grew up at sea! So the boatswain had said. Had been able to "take a sight at ten year, lad, an' work out a position, which, swiggle me, I can't do for all my size and years!" Could even match the red giant at sailorly work with ropes and wires.

What a strange upbringing for a girl! He

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had gathered that Ruth was the granddaughter of the blind man, Square Jim Dabney; that she was orphaned; that this cockleshell of a vessel had been her home since babyhood. Bred of seamen and to the sea. No wonder she paced the deck so confidently, and flung a laugh into the East Wind's very face!

She was of the breed of the silent old man who bore his affliction so steadfastly. Martin studied the patient figure of the blind man with a new interest. What a pity, that hale, active man caged in darkness! What misery, what despair, thought he, might lurk behind those fine, unmarred eyes! Yet the face was happy enough. Indeed, it was serene, unscarred by impatience or passion; the face of one who awaits Fate fearlessly. Martin had difficulty in connecting that kindly and peaceful figure with the "Old Man" of the boatswain's talk.

What stirring adventures the boatswain's casual words had hinted at! In what a bald, matter-of-fact manner had the *Cohasset's* various activities been mentioned! Pearl shell and island trade; "a bit o' filibustering now and then," to Mexico and South America; seal and fur poaching on the Siberian coast, in open defiance of the Czar's mandates!

Square Jim Dabney, might be the captain's name from the Arctic to Hobart Town, but some of the exploits the boatswain had boasted of suggested "Freebooter Jim" Dabney to Martin's mind. How about that affair where the captain had lost his eyesight? Raiding a gold-bearing reef in the Louisiades with dynamite, the boatswain had said, in derisive revolt against the Australian-mining laws.

It had happened but a few months before, and a premature explosion of a dynamite charge had been the unusual fruit of the raid—unusual because when the boatswain and others had rushed to recover what they thought was their captain's mangled body, they discovered their leader unmarred by the blast but stone-blind from the shock. An injured optic nerve, the San Francisco specialists had said, a hopeless case.

Yet even permanent blindness did not place a period to the career of this venerable Pacific free-lance. Was he not engaged in some wild venture even now? Some mysterious business that had begun with bloodshed, and would end—how? What had Little Billy said? "Bound for the End o' the World!" And what, pray, would they find at the End o' the World?

Well, he didn't care what they found there, but he was very glad to be able to voyage to the world's end with this company. He was glad he had been pitched head foremost into the affair, little as he yet understood of it all; he was glad to be at sea and shipmates with the "happy family." No longer was he a despised quill-pusher.

Just what he was at present, Martin could not decide, but he was determined to become a valued and accomplished member of this adventuring household. He was determined — like the moth to the flame, Martin's thoughts came back to the girl —he was determined to win the respect of Ruth Le Moyne, to match her self-reliance. He would show her, by George, that he did not lack for courage; that stranger though he was to sea life, he could acquit himself creditably in the face of any danger he might encounter in his new environment!

The boatswain came out of his room and paused at the foot of the companion-ladder to fill his pipe. He looked like some huge, red-shagged bear, thought Martin, a well-fed, contented bear. The hands of the clock were almost on the hour—in a moment the bosun would be on deck, and Ruth would come below. Then . . .

THE boatswain's enormous sea boots disappeared through the hatch, and a moment later eight bells struck overhead.

Martin sat up expectantly. Little Billy grinned at him from across the room. Confound the fellow! He had insisted on treating Martin as an invalid during the supper, had been absurdly solicitous about the wounded head and the turbulent stomach, when Martin had forgotten the existence of both; he had persisted in interrupting when Martin wanted to talk to Ruth. Here she came!

A light step, a little boot poked into view, and Ruth bustled down the ladder. By George, she was a beauty!

"Due west—setting more canvas," she announced briskly to Captain Dabney.

The latter turned his sightless eyes on the rosy face that bent above him; the serene, white-bearded face was suddenly beautiful with its welcoming smile. The

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blind man's hand reached out and gently stroked the girl's arm. Martin saw there was complete agreement between the two.

Ruth divested herself of the heavy pea-coat she wore, tossed it upon the divan, and drew up a chair beside the captain's.

"Well, let us commence at once with our tales of wo, and our council of war," said she laughingly. "I am quite sure Mr. Blake is perishing with curiosity. I know I would be in his place."

It was an odd assortment that gathered about the table—a girl, a blind man, a hunchback, and a clerk. A strange company for a ship's cabin, at sea.

But the incongruity escaped Martin. For the moment he had eyes but for the figure opposite him, for the trim figure revealed by the tight-fitting guernsey, for the vivid face that bloomed above. Ruth bore his gaze with composure; she even smiled at him, with a twinkle in her eye. Martin blushed.

Little Billy had brought to the table a small, locked cash-box, made of light steel. He set it carefully in the center of the table, and then took a seat by Martin's side.

Ruth spoke.

"First of all, we had better tell the whole story of the *Good Luck*, and the code, and the log, to Mr. Blake. It is unfair to keep him in darkness any longer."

"Yes—that will be best," said Captain Dabney. "I will tell about finding the wreck. But Billy must finish the tale—he is the more used to yarn-spinning. Billy, have you the box there?"

"Yes—here," answered the hunchback.

He rapped the cash-box with his fingers, and the captain nodded at the metallic sound. Then Little Billy drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the box. He threw an envelope out upon the table.

Martin blinked. He knew that plain wrapper. Yesterday afternoon old Smatt had handed him that envelope, and last night at the Black Cruiser he, himself, had delivered it to Captain Carew. Now, it was here before his eyes!

Little Billy chuckled at his amazement. Even Ruth smiled at him.

"Hello! Our friend seems to recognize Exhibit A," bantered the hunchback. "Well, Blake, without waiting for counsel's advice, I will admit that you probably have seen this very envelope before. But I bet the contents are stranger to your popping eyes!"

With that, Little Billy spread the envelope's contents upon the table.

Martin saw a plain sheet of paper, written upon by Smatt's angular hand, and a strip of some kind of animal skin, or gut, about 4x5 inches in size, and of a leprous-white color. The skin was covered with what he took to be a multitude of faint, red scratches, but upon a second look he saw that the scratches were figures.

Ruth indicated the skin with her finger.

"The secret of Fire Mountain," she said.

"Yes, the secret of Fire Mountain," echoed Little Billy. "And this—" he pointed to the paper containing Smatt's writing —"is the secret kindly bared for us by that genial gray vulture of the law, Mr. Smatt. The envelope also contained Wild Bob's clearance papers—cleared for Papeete, the slick devil—but we presented them to the gulls off the Farallones. They can go a-voyaging on them if they wish."

"A little thing like a clearance will not keep Bob Carew in port," interposed Captain Dabney.

"No, I suppose not," replied Little Billy, his face sobering. "He is on our heels now, I dare say. However, we have had the satisfaction of putting a good one over on him."

"But—but what—" stammered Martin, his eyes still upon the envelope; the others' references were Greek to him.

"So friend Blake is puzzled!" exclaimed the hunchback, his light humor returned. "Are you not beginning to see light, Blake? Observe—" he tapped the skin with a finger—"this cryptic skin contains the secret of Fire Mountain. Ichi, the wily one, abstracts it from its discoverers and rightful owners and carries it to that fine legal rascal who employed you; fine legal rascal gives it to clerk to deliver to Wild Bob Carew. Wild Bob Carew has rakish schooner ready to scoot for loot, but needs code translation, and latitude and longitude; friend Blake carries code in pocket, friend Mate carries position in head—so, there is plot and counterplot; gumshoeing and shanghaiing. You, my friend, at the center of one storm circle. Devious and devilish machinations assail you—at first with failure, for the mate lost her wits, and the boatswain lost his balance. But Little Billy Corcoran, King of Legerdemain, succeeds. With his prattling tongue and dextrous fingers he effects the substitution, and the lost is regained."

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Little Billy finished triumphantly, and beamed at Martin's blank face.

"Substitution!" exclaimed Martin.

"Yes. Must I place a tack upon your head, and smite it with a hammer, in order to drive the point home? Do you not comprehend? Little Billy sat upon a fire hydrant and very carefully picked a young gentleman's pocket."

"Why, then it was you placed the envelope containing the blank paper," commenced Martin.

"Exactly. Your intuition is remarkable," stated the hunchback. "But—please—do not look so shocked. I assure you I do not commonly pick young gentlemen's pockets. It is a vulgar pastime, and I am an accomplished villain. Why, once upon a time, I wrote an epic poem. What mere larceny can compare with that fell deed! Besides, this particular outrage upon the sanctity of your overcoat pocket was not without justification. Observe: Ichi, the beast, picks Little Billy's pocket, and the way to Fire Mountain is lost; Little Billy picks Mr. Blake's pocket, and the way to Fire Mountain is regained! Is it not beautifully simple?"

"Way to Fire Mountain! But I don't understand," answered Martin.

"Oh, don't listen to him," interrupted Ruth. "Billy, you shut up! You will have plenty of chance to talk after awhile. Captain, you tell about finding the *Good Luck*."

"Squashed!" sighed Little Billy.

CHAPTER IX

THE MOUNTAIN IN THE SMOKY SEA

"IT WON'T take me long to tell my part of the story," commenced Captain Dabney. "It happened last Summer, up in Bering Sea. I dodged out of the fog-bank, where I had been playing hide-and seek with the Russian gunboat, and saw the sun for the first time in a week, and at the same time clapped eyes upon Fire Mountain. Ay, I had my eyes then—good eyes, too."

The captain drew his hand across his sightless eyes. He had spoken in the inflectionless voice of the blind, but Martin sensed a note of bitterness, of revolt, in his voice. Ruth patted his shoulder comfortingly, and the old man continued.

"Fire Mountain, lad, is a volcano. It is a volcanic island sticking up out of the water several hundred miles off the Kamchatka coast. But I guess I had better tell you how we came to be in Bering last Summer.

"You know, lad, I am a trader. Fur is a mighty profitable trade, if you can get enough fur, and at reasonable prices, and for the last ten years I have traded every Summer along the Kamchatka and Anadyr coasts. I have left the seal rookeries alone—they are too well guarded nowadays—and traded with the natives for their furs.

"The Russian Chartered Company has a monopoly of the fur trade in Eastern Siberia, and, like any monopoly, they gouge. They insist upon about five thousand per cent. profit in their dealings with the natives. Naturally, the natives are more than anxious to trade with a free-lance. The Russian Government keeps a little tin-pot gunboat cruising up and down to prevent poaching, and if you are caught it means the mines for all hands. But, Lord! Any live Yankee can dodge those lubbers. They have chased me every year for ten years, and I have won free every time.

"The last chase they gave me was last August. We sighted the Russian just as we were coming out of a little bay below Cape Ozerni, where I had had business with a tribe of Koriaks. There was a nice little offshore, ten-knot breeze blowing, and we cracked on and made for the fog-bank.

"The fog, you know, lad, is the poachers' salvation in the Bering. In the Summer, the fog lies over the water in banks, either low and thick, or high and thin, caused by the Japan current meeting the Arctic streams. They call those waters the Smoky Seas, sometimes. You don't see the sun for weeks on end.

"This was a low-lying and thick bank we made for, and we slipped into it with the Russian about three mile astern of us. We were safe enough then, though he entered after us. We played a game of 'catch me, Susie,' for three days. It was funny. We had enough wind to drive us at about four knots; the fog was so thick you couldn't see half a cable-length in any direction; and the bank seemed of limitless width.

"We could hear the gunboat's screw miles away, but he couldn't hear us—though we'd give him a blat out of our patent fog-horn every now and then, just to let him know we were still around. Three days he

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rampaged around, looking for us, and then he gave us up for a bad job. The second morning after, we slipped out of the western rim of the bank and found ourselves in sunshine, and almost on top of as wicked a looking saw-tooth reef as I ever want to see.

"The reef encircled a mountain that stuck straight up out of the sea for about two thousand feet. It was an old volcano—still smoking. We sailed around it, and on the south side discovered a break in the reef, a little bay bitten narrowly into the mountain, and a beach.

"Well, volcanic islands are common in Bering Sea. But we were interested in this one, both because of its strange appearance, and because it was unmarked on the chart. That last was not so unusual, though. The charts of that section of Bering are mostly guesswork.

"We got a boat over the side, and Little Billy and I were pulled ashore, while Ruth kept the brig standing by. I wanted to make a closer inspection of the place, and the landing seemed good.

"The break in the reef was quite wide, and we sounded and found a channel, and good holding ground inside. We landed on a shell and black-sand beach, about forty yards wide at high water, and a couple of hundred long.

"The mountain stuck up sheer in front of us and on either side of the bay. It was full of caves—riddled like a sponge. A strange place! The mountain sides were overlaid for an unknown depth with black lava, from ancient eruptions; and this lava had hardened and twisted into all manner of shapes, all the way to the still smoking crater. That is what formed the caves—and formed also, tremendous columns, and castles, and animals' heads.

"On the level with the little beach were several cave openings. One was a jutting rock that looked just like an elephant's head carved out of the black lava, and beneath the outflung trunk, was a black opening leading into the mountain. There was the sound of running water from within, and the wind howled like a sabbath of witches. We didn't investigate—no torches. At one end of the beach we found three springs of hot water squirting out of the rock—tasted sulfurous.

"The beach contained quite a bit of driftage, and some old timbers we knew were from a wreck. Then, 'way up on the beach, and behind some big boulders, we discovered the ribs of a whaleboat, a rust-eaten sheath-knife, and a board that contained part of a ship's name. The lettering was almost effaced; we made out the letters LUC — and beneath it the word, BEDFORD.

"Well, the discovery of that wreckage told us that we weren't the first to visit the place. The word 'Bedford' was a good clue—it meant that a New Bedford whaleship had been there at some time; and the wreckage meant that she had probably been wrecked upon the reef. There was nothing else to be found, though we searched for evidences of castaways. But the wreck had happened a good many years ago, we could tell from the appearance of the whaleboat's remains, and if there had been any castaways, all signs of them had disappeared.

"We snooped around a little bit longer, felt a baby earthquake, and then went back aboard the ship. I marked the location on the chart, and we squared away for the Kamchatka coast. An hour later, the fog shut the smoking mountain from our view and from my mind until Little Billy made his discovery in Honolulu a few months ago.

"Now, Billy, you commence—it is your yarn from now on!"

The captain heaved a contented sigh, settled himself into a listening attitude, and turned his blind face to the hunchback.

CHAPTER X

THE WHALEMAN'S LOG

"MY TURN to talk?" exclaimed the lively hunchback. "Fine! Talking is my favorite sport. But before I commence, I will show friend Blake, here, Exhibit B."

He reached into the cashbox and drew out a little book. Martin observed that it was apparently a pocket notebook, a cheap, dog-eared thing with cracked cardboard covers. Little Billy held it up before Martin's eyes.

"This is Exhibit B," he continued. "Read this, on the fly-leaf!"

Martin leaned closer and saw written in faded ink on the fly-leaf the inscription,

John Winters,
His Log.
Bark *Good Luck* of New Bedford.
1889.
No. 2.

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"Ah, I see your mind is leaping to conclusions!" went on Little Billy, as surmise and understanding flitted across Martin's face. "And correct conclusions, I have no doubt. But before I confirm your suspicions, by reading excerpts from John Winters's Log, I had better tell you how this little book came into our possession.

"So then, let us jump from Bering Sea to Honolulu, and from August to January. My narrative commences with the night I spent in Kim Chee's Chamber of Horrors, while recovering from my semi-annual drunk.

"Oh, don't try to shield me—" as Ruth attempted to interpose—"Blake may as well be made acquainted with my failing. He would find out anyway."

Martin was taken aback by the violent interjection. A grim cloud rested for a moment on the hunchback's sunny face, and the man looked suddenly aged. Martin saw that Ruth's face was soft with sympathy. But Little Billy's next words were enlightening.

"Perhaps I could justly pass the buck to my begettors," he said. "I came into the world handicapped—a crooked back, and a camel's desire and capacity for liquids—alcoholic liquids. I am a periodical drunkard. Every six months, or so, I am constrained by the imp within me to saturate myself with spirits and wallow in the gutter, like a pig in a sty."

"Oh, don't believe him—it is not so bad as that!" cried Ruth.

"It is indeed," asserted Little Billy. "As witness this time, when I fought the 'willies' in Kim Chee's rubbish room. It must be admitted, though, that this particular spree had a fruitful ending, for it was in Kim Chee's that I discovered the secret of Fire Mountain. It was this way:

"When we came down from the Bering in September, we sold our furs to a Jap syndicate in Hakodate. The captain has dealt regularly with that Jap firm—they pay good prices, and ask few questions. Then we left Hakodate on our Winter trip—captain had the idea that he might run across something worth while in the neighborhood of Torres Straits. But, let me mention in passing, before we sailed we shipped a cook. He was a Jap named Ichi, an affable little man who couldn't speak very good English, who seemed rather dull-witted for his race. More of him, later on.

"Down South we had the accident, and the captain's eyes were injured. We made a record passage to Honolulu, arrived there the first week in January, and the captain went ashore to the hospital. The bosun and I snugged down everything on board, and then I succumbed to my habit. I went ashore and tried to place Honolulu in the dry column by swallowing all the whisky in town. I suppose I had a glorious time—I don't remember much about it. But about a week later I came to one evening in Kim Chee's place, with a dollar and five cents in my pocket, a blazing stomach, and a troupe of goblins affixed to my person as a retinue.

"Kim Chee is the oldest, most wrinkled-up Chinaman in the world. He has had that drinking den in Honolulu for forty years—ran it in the old days when the King and the Opium Ring governed Hawaii. It has always been a sailor resort; in the old days it was a whalemen's rendezvous. Fine old gentleman, Kim Chee.

"I couldn't drink any more, and I was jumpy. So Kim Chee ushered me into his Chamber of Horrors. The Chamber of Horrors is an institution at Kim's place. It is a rubbish room, filled with the junk the old Chinaman has collected during a lifetime, and whenever one of his patrons gets the horrors from imbibing his bottled dynamite, Kim chucks him into this room to die or get over it as the Fates decree.

"So I found myself in this room, with an old lantern for light. I was in a bad way. I was seeing things. Not alligators or monkeys, such as the conventional drunk is supposed to see, but Things, faceless formless Things who brushed against me and leered at me out of the corners. *Urrghl* The memory makes me quake.

"I was afraid of losing control of myself, and to keep myself occupied, and my tormentors in the background, I commenced to paw over the junk pile. I was searching for something to read.

"Well, there was an assortment in that room that would have gladdened the heart of any collector—native weapons from all the islands of the Pacific, carved whalebone from the North, knickknacks from wherenot, everything that a couple of generations of sailormen could leave behind them. There were sea-chests and sea-bags that belonged to men who, I doubt not, were drowned before I was born. But nowhere did I find what I sought—something to read.

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"I was about to give up the search when I picked up a small package, oilskin-wrapped and securely tied with marlin. It had lain in that corner for a long, long time. It was covered with dust, and the oilskin was brittle dry. The package felt like a book. I opened it, and found I had John Winters's diary in my hand.

"I read that inscription on the fly-leaf, but I must confess that I didn't think of Fire Mountain at the moment. That came later. But I was interested—a sailor's private log always interests a man who knows the sea. I sat down on one of the old chests, drew the lantern close and commenced to read. And as I read, I forgot my ills entirely.

"Now, I'll read you portions of this little book. Afterward, if you wish, Blake, you may read it through yourself. It is worth while—the record of a whaling voyage. But just now I will confine myself to the parts that directly affect us. Queer thought, isn't it, that the words this chap wrote a quarter of a century ago, whose face none of us has ever seen, who is also twenty-five years dead, should affect our several destinies? Fate is a strange jade!

"But first, a word about the author of this log. This John Winters was the second mate of the whaling bark *Good Luck* of New Bedford, one gleans from reading the book. The inscription on the fly-leaf mentions the date, 1889, also the figure 'No. 2.' The number two means that this is the second log on the voyage. Research through some old 'Marine Bulletins' the captain owns told us that the whaleship *Good Luck* left New Bedford on her last voyage in the year 1887, and that she refitted in Honolulu in the Fall of 1889, reported missing, with all hands, two years later. Winters's log commences with the departure of the ship from Honolulu in November, '89.

"The first entry that interests us is made several months later, on March 23rd, 1890. Position given as 158° E. 9°, 18′ N. That places the *Good Luck* somewhere in the Carolines, on the sperm whale grounds. It goes:

This day Westphal fell from the fore rigging and broke his arm. Still no sign of fish. The Old Man is in a bad temper because of our poor luck, and he is talking of going north already. Mr. Garboy says there is a Jonah aboard. I think he is the Jonah. Westphal is a Dutch lubber.

"I read this entry mainly to acquaint you with John Winters," continued Little Billy. "You see, this was his private journal, and he was given to expressing his true feelings concerning his shipmates. This Mr. Garboy he mentions was the chief mate of the *Good Luck*. The next entry I have marked is dated March 26th, and they are still on the Caroline grounds.

This day I did cover myself with glory, and did take Garboy down a peg. This morning we raised fish, a big school of cachalot, about three mile to leeward. We lowered four boats. I had Silva for harpooner, the best man on the ship. The mate had Lord Joe, the Jamaica nigger.

Murphy and Costa bore south to head the school, and Garboy and I bore straight for them. Raced to see who would first back, and I won. Backed a big bull, and Silva gave him the iron deep. He flurried without sounding, and I did not have to lance. Garboy backed his whale and Lord Joe made a poor cast, and they lost the fish. I backed a cow, and made fast. She sounded, but we overhauled at her first blow, and I lanced. Short flurry. Two fish in less than hour!

Garboy went for a big bull. He had put Lord Joe at the sweep, and was going to harpoon himself. He backed, and made a fine cast. But the fish, instead of sounding, turned on their boat, and took it in his mouth. They all spilled clear except Lord Joe; the poor nigger was caught. Then the fish sounded, and made off with a tub of line. I picked up Garboy and his crew, all except Lord Joe—the nigger was gone—and I made fast to the wreckage. Garboy was wild. I never heard better swearing.

Costa and Murphy both made a kill, making four fish. And Costa picked up a lump of ambergrease near his kill. Captain Peabody was very pleased with my work, but he dug into old Garboy. The mate squirmed, and it tickled me, because he has bragged so much about his record. He damned Lord Joe mightily, but Lord Joe don't mind, he is with Davy Jones. The ambergrease weighs twenty-five pounds. A fine day's work!

"There you are, 'a fine day's work,' and the pestiferous Mr. Garboy taken down a peg. I read the entire entry, but the part that really concerns us, is the part about the ambergris they picked up. Tell me, Blake, do you know anything about ambergris?"

"No, never heard of the stuff," answered Martin.

"Then we will have to digress a moment, while I attend to your neglected education," said Little Billy. "Because, from tonight, you will think of ambergris by day, and dream of it by night—ambergris in kegs, oodles of it! I don't suppose your legal training acquainted you with the technical details of the perfume industry?"

"No, I must plead ignorance," conceded Martin.

"Then pay attention," admonished Little Billy. "Ambergris, my friend, is the

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stuff John Winters calls ambergrease, like the good whaleman he was. It is a waxy substance, very light weight, that forms inside of a sperm whale, and which friend whale belches forth when he gets the colic from feasting too heartily upon squid. Squid, otherwise cuttle-fish, is a horrid monster, all arms and beak, which the cachalot considers a most dainty tidbit. Scientific sharks disagree as to the exact process that forms ambergris, but they all agree that it comes from an overindulgence in squid. Ambergris is very rarely obtained, especially nowadays when the whaling industry is almost dead, and it is actually worth double its weight in gold.

"It is used as a base in the manufacture of the finest perfumes. It is the best perfume base obtainable—it has the virtue of making the odor superfine and enduring. The demand for it is insistent, and unsatisfied—doubly insistent at the present time, for the supply of the best substitute for ambergris, the sac of the Himalayan musk deer, has also been steadily waning, and has now almost been dried up by the European War. Today there is an almost unlimited market for ambergris, and the lucky seller can command his own price. The stuff is precious. We looked up prices in Frisco and found that forty dollars an ounce will be paid without haggling.

"So now you know what ambergris is, and its connection with the perfume industry. Soon you will see its connection with us. Meanwhile, let us to John Winters's journal again.

"The next relevant entry is five days later, March 31st:

This day we picked up another piece of ambergrease, floating past overside. Silva spotted it, and he gets ten pounds of tobacco as a reward. It weighed ten pounds. The Old Man is very joyous; he says it means good luck. This afternoon we raised two islands, well wooded. Captain Peabody knows these islands. They are uninhabited, and the north one is well watered. To-morrow we wood and water.

"And then, comes the smashing dénouement, the very next day, April 1, 1890:

This day there did happen to us the like which no whaleman aboard can remember. I will write it down like it happened.

This morning, at dawn, we came through the channel into the lagoon of the north island. It is a very difficult channel. A current sweeps the shore and runs through it like it was a big funnel, and all the driftage hereabouts comes into the lagoon. We let go anchor in ten fathoms, a half mile from the beach.

I was given the wooding, and Costa was told off to water. We towed the casks ashore, and landed on a fine, white beach, that was littered with driftage. While the men were rolling the casks up to the spring Captain Peabody told us about, Costa and I took a walk along the beach. We came upon a great squid lying dead. He had been bitten in two by a cachalot, and had only three arms left, but they were of tremendous length. Then we saw pieces of other squid all along the beach.

Suddenly Costa ran forward, and gave a great shout, and bent over what I had taken to be a big jelly-fish. "By Gar—grease!" says he. It was a big lump of ambergrease, the biggest any man aboard has ever seen. It weighs 198 pounds.

But this was not all. Costa and I danced around our find like madmen, and the hands came running up. Then Silva gave a shout, and we found he had discovered a lump of grease. Then we looked along the beach, and we found it was dotted with the precious stuff.

I sent Costa straightway aboard to tell the captain, and he and Mr. Garboy came ashore in a great hurry. I never saw anybody take on like Garboy. The Old Man brought everybody ashore, except the cook and chips, and we combed the beach all the way around the lagoon, and around the seaward rim of the island. But we didn't find any grease except inside. By nightfall we had a big boatload, and we went aboard. The captain and Mr. Garboy are on the poop now, helping the cooper stow it, themselves, so afraid are they that some of it will be smuggled forward. The Old Man is dancing with joy.

"There you are—all of that entry. Just think of those two chaps dancing around their find, beside a giant dead squid! I wager that was the supreme moment of their greasy lives. I wager that old spouter seethed with excitement and gossip that night. No wonder the Old Man danced! How would you like to stumble on a windfall like that, Blake? But let us get on.

"I'll read the entry for three days later. In the interim, they had lain to anchor in the lagoon, and continued their search for more ambergris.

We did not get any more grease today, though we raked and scraped the beach. There is no more. The Old Man says he is satisfied, and we leave tomorrow morning. Everybody is speculating about how so much grease came to be here. Nobody knows for sure. Garboy says that this is a great place for squid, and that the school of Cachalot we were in a couple of weeks ago had been here feeding. He says that something was the matter with the squid and that the fish got sick and vomited the grease.

I don't know, it may be so, the stuff is full of squid beaks. But Garboy is too cocksure. Anyway we have the stuff, and stowed safe in the lazaret. Counting what we picked up before, we have 1,500 pounds. A great fortune for the owners, and a fine bonus for us. When I get home, I will buy a farm, and settle down ashore.

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"So—1500 pounds, and worth more than half a million dollars, according to prices paid in those days—today, worth a million. John Winters might well indulge in dreams of bucolic bliss; the whalemen, you know, received a substantial bonus on ambergris finds, over and above their regular lay.

"The log for the next few days is filled with the various speculations rife as to the origin of the treasure, of visions of quiet farm life in New England, and of hopes concerning a girl named Alice. Then, on April 25th, 144°, 48′ E. Longitude, 20°33′ N. Latitude—that shows they were at the northern limits of the Ladrones—he writes:

We are to have another season up north, in Okhotsk and Bering seas. The Old Man and Mr. Garboy have had a fine argument about it. Garboy says we have enough to make the owners happy, and give us all a fine lay, and that we can't trust the foremast hands with all the grease aboard.

Captain Peabody says he is going home with a full ship, grease or no grease, that the hands may be ——, that they haven't the guts to get at the grease anyway, and that it isn't the mate's place to give him advice. So Garboy shut up, and we are bound north after the baleen. Well, I think Garboy is right, though he hasn't any business offering advice to the Old Man. I am glad the Old Man shut him up. Anyway, a full ship means more dollars, and I will need plenty of dollars to start life ashore with. I will have enough to buy the old Wentworth place. I think Alice will take me, and if she don't, there are plenty of other girls in the world.

"You see, friend Winters is indulging in the time-honored pastime of spending his payday before he has it; and of vowing the usual sailor vow to leave the sea and buy a farm. Well, perhaps the poor devil was in earnest; but he didn't have a chance to achieve his ambition.

"Now we will skip to the last regular entries in the book. They are dated several months later, August of 1890, and the *Good Luck* has been on the northern grounds for some time. No position is given, for reasons you will appreciate. First is dated August 15th:

Still in the fog. We have been three weeks without a sight, fogbound, and blundering God knows where. The breeze holds from the southwest at about three knots, but the bank is moving with the wind. It is so thick we can not see a ship's length in any direction. The current is strong and westerly.

I know the Old Man is worried, because the Kamchatka coast is close a-lee. Garboy says he was in a bank in these seas one time for ten weeks. I think he is a liar. I am thinking a lot about Alice.

"Next entry two days later, August 17th," said the hunchback.

Still fogbound. Heavy groundswell from sou'-east. Garboy says it means a sou'east blow, and I think he is right. Well, anything to blow away this cursed fog! The Old Man is drunk today. The old skinflint never hands out a swig to any of us, though. We must be near land, for we hear birds flying above the fog. All hands standing by, and we are keeping the best lookout possible. The Old Man should sober up, and attend to business.

"There, that is the last regular entry, the last one he wrote upon the ship. Here is the next one—observe the different ink! This is written in red, the same color as those figures upon the skin. I think Winters wrote with one of those red writing-sticks you buy on the China Coast; he probably had one in his pocket. This entry tells of tragedy—mark how it begins:

May God have mercy! I will write down our plight, though I know there is small chance of these words reaching civilization. I sit in the window of the dry cave, on the Fire Mountain, and write by the light of the midnight sun!

Manuel Silva and I are the sole survivors of the wreck of the *Good Luck*. Thirty-five were lost. We are cast away on a barren island. It is a volcanic mountain, filled with black caves. There is a bottomless hole that belches steam, and the earth shakes. We do not know our latitude or longitude. God help us, we only know we are cast away in the empty Bering sea, near the Asia coast!

It happened a week ago. I had the deck. We were running before a hard gale from the sou'east, and the Old Man was drunk. It was very thick, and impossible to keep a good lookout. Then, just after two bells in the middle watch, I heard breakers. I had only time to order the wheel up, when we struck. We jammed between two monster rocks, and the masts went by the board, and the ship broke in two. The fore part went to pieces, and all the hands forward, except Silva, who was at the wheel, went too.

The stern was wedged fast. Garboy and Costa gained the deck from the cabin. The others must have drowned in their bunks. We launched the quarterboat, but it swamped, and we were spilled into the boiling sea. I was washed free of the reef, and made the beach. I found Silva there.

We were 'most frozen, and bruised badly. I got out the matches I had in the waterproof packet I carry this log in, and we made a fire of driftwood in one of the caves, and warmed ourselves. Then, we looked for the others, it being daylight, except for the couple of hours after midnight. But we found not a body.

We salvaged all the wreckage we could reach. It was not much, for the currents swept most of the stuff to sea. We got a cask of beef, and one of biscuit. The quarterboat came ashore, only a little damaged. We also got the wreckage of No. 4 whaleboat, and her gear, and some timbers, and a handy billy.

That day the gale was spent, and next day was clear and calm. We repaired the quarterboat with stuff from the whaleboat, and she is tight. Then we pulled off to the wreck, and succeeded in boarding her. Then the Devil entered into us, and we

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were possessed by greed. We had planned to get clothes, and stores from the lazaret; but when we got into the lazaret, we had not thought but for the treasure of ambergrease. We spent all the day getting the ambergrease to shore. We were greatly tired by the labor, and, since the wreck showed no signs of breaking up, we went into a cave and turned in.

While we slept, it came on to blow again. When we awoke, the seas were breaking over the wreck. The bay was quiet, sheltered by the mountain, so our stuff on the beach had come to no harm. But during the day the wreck broke up, and swept to sea. We salvaged but one box of candles—not a particle of the clothes and food we so sorely need. So, doth Providence justly punish us for our greed!

Silva was greatly disheartened, but I braced him up. We set about to explore the caves, with the candles; for we wanted a dry cave to sleep in, and to stow the ambergrease in. The ground-level caves are all wet from steam, though they are warm. So, we went into the mountain through the Elephant Head, toward the great noise. We came to a windy cave, where there was a great Bottomless Hole, that the noise came out of. Silva went half mad with terror, for he is very superstitious, but I saw it was steam. But it is an evil place. And afterward we found the hole in the roof that led to this dry cave.

This window I write by is the only daylight opening of the dry cave, and it is full forty feet above the beach. But we had no nerve to look deeper into the black guts of this awful place, and we decided to use this cave. So, I rigged the handy billy, and we hoisted all the grease in through the window, and stowed it. And we have taken up our quarters here, and I have made a ladder from the rope of the handy billy, so we can come in through the window, and don't have to pass through that fearsome place where the hole is.

"There—that was written a week after the wreck," said Little Billy. "The next one, three days later:

We have been here ten days, now, and I think things look mighty black. Silva's nerve is gone, and I have to fight to keep mine. The mountain shakes continuously, and we fear it will erupt. And always, there is the noise, the moaning in the hole, and the great rumble. It has got Silva.

Silva has gone down to the beach to get shellfish. We are saving the beef, as much as we can. I am glad Silva is out of my sight. He is mad—and, God help me! I fear I am going mad, too. He sits and looks at me by the hour, just looks, looks, and says not a word, and his eyes burn.

I am feared of him. He is a murderer. He told me so, when his conscience mastered him. He told me why he feared the hole. He drank of the hot spring, and when he got a bellyache, he thought he was dying. Then he told me that he was one of the hands on the *Argonaut*, a dozen years ago, and that there was mutiny, and that he strangled the captain with his hands. And he says the moaning down in the hole is the captain calling him. He is very superstitious. Now, he prays by the hour, and then curses horribly. And he goes down to the edge of the hole and howls at the captain. I try to talk with him, and plan to reach the mainland in the quarterboat, but he shakes his head, and just looks, looks. I have taken his sheath knife, but I fear to wake and find him strangling me. But I will leave here, whether he will go or not. Better to die at sea, than in this black place!

"Now—the next entry. Day or two later, I judge," said Billy.

He is gone! He was sitting opposite me, and suddenly he sings out something in his own lingo, and sprang to his feet, and rushed down toward the hole leading to the windy cave. He was laughing awfully. I followed—but could not catch him. He jumped into the hole and the noise stopped. And I stayed through the shake, and saw the lights from the pit. God help me, I wanted to jump, too!

I am going to leave this place to-morrow. I have repaired the quarterboat, and hopeless or not, I will try to reach Kamchatka. It is better than to stay here, and go mad, and follow Silva!

I have written the secret of the cave on a piece of the lining of my parka, though God knows if I shall ever need it. I have a little beef, and biscuit, and the breaker from the wreck of the whaleboat. Little enough! If I only had the latitude and longitude of this place, I might guess my chances. But—not even a compass!

"The next entry is just a scrawl," said Little Billy. "It is barely legible."

I am in the fog—the terrible gray fog! No water! I see Alice in the fog!

"And then—the end."

I see Silva sitting opposite me. He looks, looks! Lord God, hast thou deserted me?

CHAPTER XI

THE CODE

THERE was a moment's silence as Little Billy finished reading. There was in the hunchback's face, and in the faces of the girl and the old captain, a somber understanding of John Winters' fate.

The whaleman's pitiful experience was a commonplace of the sea, and it required no effort of mind on their part to vision the tragedy of an open boat on an empty sea. But Martin was more sharply impressed. The sea held as yet no commonplaces for him, and the poignant question that ended the castaway's chronicle kindled a flame of pity. Martin had the picture mind, and a habit of dramatizing events.

As Little Billy read, Martin had unconsciously followed the narrative with his mind's eye, building a series of vivid, connected pictures. He had witnessed the battle with the whales, the finding of the treasure, had peered baffled into the blanket of Bering fog, had seen the leaping breakers at the base of the smoking mountain, had excursioned through the caves by

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Winters' side, and, at last, had beheld clearly the little open boat, with its despairing occupant, disappear into the gray mist.

"The poor devil!" cried Martin.

His words broke the spell of silence that was upon the table.

"Yes — the poor devil!" echoed Little Billy. "My very words, as I finished reading, there in Kim Chee's place. 'The poor devil!' A fitting epitaph."

"But why an epitaph?" asked Martin quickly. Visions of an eleventh-hour rescue were surging through his mind. He felt one was necessary to round out his reel of pictures. "Could he not have been rescued after making that last entry? Why, he must have been rescued! How else could the journal have reached Honolulu?"

"He was picked up," interposed Ruth.

"By another whaler," added Little Billy. "Sick to death, and completely lunatic. He never recovered his reason. He died in Kim Chee's place. But I will continue my yarn, and you will see.

"You can imagine, of course, the progressive transformation I underwent, while curled up on that old sea-chest, perusing the log. I began merely with the intention of forcing my mind away from myself, and thereby quieting my booze-jangled nerves; in a moment, I was interested; then I was excited by the whalemen's discovery of the ambergris, and lastly I was overwhelmed by the fact that John Winters' Fire Mountain was identical with the *Cohasset's* Fire Mountain. The description clinched that fact. And to make more certain, I recalled the wreckage the captain and I had come across, and the board with the nearly effaced lettering upon it. The letters upon that board were, 'LUC,' and beneath, the word 'BEDFORD.' Of course, it was the remnant of *'Good Luck*, of New Bedford.'

"It was about four o'clock in the morning when I finished the book. I summoned the Chinaman, straightway. Kim was asleep, and he came grumbling, in answer to my call. He thought I wanted drink, but John Winters had effectually doused the flame in my vitals. I had happened upon the probable clue to a vast treasure, and the thought of it obsessed me.

"I put the question to Kim as to how the journal came to be in the Chamber of Horrors. It was a poser for Kim. His old yellow face wrinkled into a thousand dark creases, in the lantern's dim light, and his shrewd, beady eyes wandered uncertainly between the book and my face. But at last he remembered, and in his forcible and inimitable manner he enlightened me.

" 'Why flor you sing out? Me catchie one piecie dleam. You no catchie 'lisky? Why flor you want? Me savvy blook. Long time—one time come glease ship. Up no'lth, sailorman he catchie one fellow walk about one piecie boat alone. Velly sick. Catch 'im bats in 'liskers. Bring um Kim Chee. Sailorman go 'way— —— 'tief! No pay. Qleer fellow velly sick. No eat, no dlink, velly 'ot—all time tlalk, tlalk, about piecie glease. —— fool clazy! Bimeby die. Flind piecie blook under clothes. Kim Chee no savvy. Why flor you want blook? 'Ow much you got? Dolla flive—all light, you take. Me go bed.'

"From which discourse, I gathered that Kim Chee had been rudely interrupted in the midst of a sweet dream; that he could not fathom my sudden distaste for whisky; that a long time ago a whaleship had come into port with a sick man aboard, whom they had picked up in an open boat, up north; that they brought the sick man to Kim, and departed without paying over any money; that Kim Chee had cared for the sick man, until the latter died; that the sick man had been out of his head, had talked constantly of 'grease,' had been crazy; that Kim had removed the diary from the man's body, after death; that he would let me have it gladly for a dollar and five cents; that he was going back to bed and didn't want to be disturbed again by the unaccountable vagaries of a dipsomaniacal white man.

"I didn't bother Kim again. Indeed, I clasped my cheaply purchased treasure close, hied myself with speed to the docks, and had myself pulled off to the brig. My spree was ended, and I felt that I held in my hand the best piece of fortune that had befallen the happy family in many a day.

"I reasoned, you see, that the treasure of ambergris was still in its hiding-place on Fire Mountain — and subsequent events have not shaken that belief. I reasoned that Winters had been picked up some time after he had made his last entry in the log, that he was out of his head when rescued, and that he never regained sanity.

"His rescuers apparently did not bother to search him, or else, with the cunning of the crazed, Winters concealed from them

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his journal. If they had happened upon it, they would surely have appropriated it. Their dumping him off on Kim Chee was not so heartless as it sounds—the sick man was undoubtedly better off ashore in Hawaii than aboard a cruising whaler, and Kim Chee is famed for his charity from one end of the Pacific to the other.

"AT BREAKFAST that morning, I acquainted Ruth with the discovery, and read to her the passages I read to you. It was an exciting breakfast.

"We were waited upon by Ichi, the little Jap we shipped as cook in Hakodate. Polite, stupid, unfamiliar with the English language, we did not think it necessary to guard our speech against him. Indeed, we never gave him a thought, and we discussed my find pro and con very freely. We dwelt upon the value of the treasure, verified the *Good Luck's* reported loss by research, congratulated ourselves upon our knowledge of the position of Fire Mountain—all in the hearing of the self-effacing Ichi. We were only daunted by the prospect of searching blindly through that cave-riddled mountain. Then, Ruth found the code."

"Yes, it was pure luck," interposed Ruth. "I was examining the book, and I noticed a crack in the length of the cover. I looked more closely and discovered that the cover had been slit lengthwise, and that a piece of skin had been inserted."

"That is it—Exhibit A," said Little Billy. He pointed to the white strip on the table. "We recognized it instantly as the piece of parka lining Winters mentions using to write upon the secret of the cave. It is a piece of the skin of an unborn reindeer. The Kamchatka tribes line their fur garments with that skin, and Winters had evidently obtained his parka from them. The writing, you see, is all numerals."

Martin picked up and inspected the skin curiously. Unborn reindeer skin! He rubbed the glossy substance between his fingers. It felt uncanny to his touch, this relic of a long-past tragedy, this message from the world's end. And the message seemed to be no more than a faded jumble of figures. He read them carefully, searching in vain for some hint of meaning.

433445442361533146121511132362433615311535231133446231511146464344114212341142146522433145461311511562635344244611313421446333442442361334423315426144254613115115

"But how do you know this is a code?" Martin asked curiously.

"Three excellent reasons," said Little Billy. "First, John Winters mentions writing down the secret of the treasure's location, and we discover this skin; second, your genial former employer deciphered these figures for the affable Ichi; third, Ruth and I proved the correctness of the deciphering this morning.

"I guess I had better acquaint you with the method of this means of communication. I don't know how a simple seaman, like John Winters seems to have been, could have become familiar with the art of cryptography—probably from reading, possibly devised the thing himself. It is very simple once you have the key—quite useful, too, Ruth and I talked to each other through a wall by this code, back there in Bob Carew's lair. Consultation with Poe's *Gold Bug*, and an hour's application that morning after breakfast, gave me the key, though I had no chance that day to discover more. It is what is called a 'checker-board' code. Here, I will draw it out!"

The hunchback turned to a blank space in the diary and rapidly sketched a diagram. He handed it across, for Martin's interested inspection, and Martin beheld the following:

	1	2	3	4	5
1	a	b	c	d	e
2	f	g	h	i	j
3	l	m	n	o	p
4	q	r	s	t	u
5	v	w	x	y	z

Number 6 for spacing between words.

"You will observe that the letter 'k' is missing," said Little Billy. "You use 'c' for 'k,' and to write a message, you merely write down the line the letter is on, and its position on that line. Thus, in Winters'

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message, the first two numerals are '43.' That means, fourth line, third letter, or the letter 's.' You see, you take the numbers in pairs—that is, until you reach a number 6.

"There are no numbers in the code above 5, so Winters used a 6 to indicate the spaces between words. To illustrate: Winters' secret begins with the numbers 43344544236. Pair these numbers off, and we have 43-34-45-44-23-6. Decipher with the diagram, and we have, 4th line 3rd letter, or 's,' 3rd line 4th letter, or 'o,' 4th line 5th letter, or 'u,' 4th line 4th letter, or 't,' 2nd line 3rd letter, or 'h.' That makes s-o-u-t-h, or the word 'south.'

"But there is no need of my continuing the translation. Friend Smatt has kindly attended to that for us. Here it is."

Martin took the proffered piece of paper, the piece of paper covered with Smatt's handwriting, that had come out of the envelope. He read in Lawyer Smatt's bold, angular hand,

South end beach—in elephant head—4 starboard—windy cave—2 port—aloft—north corner dry cave.

"That marks the location of our prospective, odorous loot," continued the hunchback. "No doubt about it. The Captain and I remember very well the cave opening in the rock shaped like an elephant's head, on the south end of Fire Mountain's beach. It is up to us to get there first."

"But how did Smatt—" commenced Martin.

"How did Smatt come to be in possession of the skin? I am coming to that. The Jap, Ichi, brought it to him.

"That morning, after Ruth and I had discussed the diary, Ruth set out for shore to visit the Captain in the hospital. She took Winters' book along with her to read to the Captain—good thing she did, as it turned out. I stayed aboard and tackled the code. As I said, I discovered the key after an hour's or so application. That is, I had fathomed the checker-board, had drawn a diagram, and had begun to decipher. Then my much-abused body went on strike.

"You remember, I was just at the end of an extended spree. For a week I had swum in stimulants and gone without rest. I was near a breakdown when Kim Chee took me in hand. The discovery of the log braced me up. But all of a sudden, while I was working here in the cabin over that scrap of reindeer skin, I collapsed.

"I called for Ichi and ordered black coffee. I remember he answered my call by materializing almost instantly at my side. He must have been lingering behind my chair—though I do not recollect seeing him about the cabin after Ruth left for shore. He brought me a large cup of black coffee. I drank it, and went promptly to sleep. It may have been a drug, or it may have been nature having her way with me."

"It was drugged coffee the Jap gave you," stated Captain Dabney with finality. "I know those yellow imps!"

Martin started at the blind man's sudden interjection into the conversation. Since he had concluded his story, Captain Dabney had sat listening, immobile and silent. At times Martin had suspected him of dozing. But now, his emphatic outburst proved that he had followed Little Billy's words closely.

"That Ichi lad was no dunderhead," continued the Captain. "He was playing a part aboard here. He was commissioned by that Hakodate crowd to discover our trading points—if this ambergrease affair hadn't turned up and tempted him, he would have stayed with us and made the trip north this Summer. Then next year a couple of Jap schooners would have gone ahead of us, peddling booze to the tribes, and killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Blast their yellow hides! I never traded with a trustworthy Jap in my life."

"Yes, he was doubtless a spy of the syndicate," assented Little Billy. "Certainly he was playing a part aboard here, for when I ran across him yesterday morning, in Frisco, he was anything but the cookie of a wind-jammer, and his English showed a remarkable improvement.

"In any event, whether Ichi drugged my coffee or not, I was dead to the world as soon as I swallowed it. When the boatswain came aboard—he had been ashore for a couple of days, searching for me—in the middle of the afternoon, he found me asleep in my chair. He thought I was drunk, and he picked me up and carried me to my bunk. When Ruth came aboard later, bringing the Captain with her, it was discovered that Ichi had vanished, and Ruth had to prepare the cabin supper that night. I slept till morning. When I awoke, I discovered

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that Winters' code had vanished with the cook."

"We also discovered that Ichi had tried unsuccessfully to open the safe in the Captain's room," said Ruth. "He was undoubtedly after the old log book that contained the entry about the discovery of Fire Mountain, including the latitude and longitude."

"Well, he was successful enough in making off with the code," said Little Billy. "We combed Honolulu for him that day, without result. Two ships had left the afternoon before—one bound for the Orient, the other for California. Our missing cookie appeared upon the passenger list of neither vessel, but we concluded that he had taken steerage passage for Yokohama.

"The loss of the code was a serious matter. Of course, we knew the location of the island, and we were determined to square away for Fire Mountain as soon as the season permitted, but we were rather dismayed by the prospect of having to search blindly through that labyrinth of caves for the *Good Luck's* treasure. That Winters and Silva had stowed the stuff in some well concealed place was evident from the entry in the log, and from the use of a code. We were dubious of success in our quest until last night.

"Jump from Hawaii to San Francisco. We came up to Frisco, you know, to consult some specialists about the Captain's eyesight. Yesterday, the Captain came aboard from the hospital. We were lying off Angel Island, ready for sea, and awaiting the Captain's word to up anchor and away for the Bering—it will be the open season up there by the time we have completed the passage.

"Yesterday was a holiday with us. It was the occasion of our revered and beloved chief mate's twenty-first natal day, and in the morning, the boatswain and I set forth for shore in search of suitable offerings."

"I know—you were setting forth to buy flowers," broke in Martin. "Bosun told me —you got——"

"We got lost from each other; intentionally lost on my part, as I confessed to you. Well, friend Ichi was the innocent cause of that harrowing separation.

"It happened in one of the many thirst parlors that line Market Street. The bosun and I had stepped in to wet our whistles, and, looking out of the open door, I was astounded to perceive our truant cookie pass by. The bosun was occupied at the moment with a nickel poker machine. I did not disturb him — he is a hasty, straightforward person and unfitted for a subtle pursuit. I slipped through the door and fell into the wake of the Jap. But what a metamorphosed sea-cook I trailed! Resplendent in fine feathers, Ichi looked more like a diplomat or banker than anything else.

"I trailed him through the streets for an hour. Once he stopped before a news-stand and purchased a paper, and I was close enough to overhear him speak perfect English to the clerk. He finally led me into an office building, up an elevator, and to the office of one Josiah Smatt, Attorney at Law. Ichi entered this office. I, following by the elevator's next trip, saw him disappear through the door. I applied my eagle eye to the aperture intended for keys and spying, and saw you, my dear Blake, direct the Oriental blossom into an inner office.

"Along the hall meandered one of the loquacious brotherhood, book under arm, conquest in his eye. Inspiration struck me a thump. I fell in the way of the book agent and became a ready victim of his wiles. For a consideration, I became owner of the volume. As soon as he had my money, the agent made for the stairs, evidently fearing I would repent my bargain. When he had disappeared, I adopted his rôle and burst in upon the hapless clerk of Lawyer Smatt with the matchless 'Compendium of Universal Knowledge.'

"You know what transpired then, for you were that very hapless clerk. You were very pleasant to the poor book agent, Blake, but you refused to be seduced by the alluring description I gave my wares."

"By George! You talked like a sure-enough book pest," asserted Martin. "But I noticed something phony about you—your tanned face, and the tattoo marks on your arms. I remember, I wondered how a book agent came by such ornaments."

"Yes, and I noticed you wondered why my eyes were roving around your office," added Little Billy. "I was looking for Ichi. I placed him in that inner office, heard his voice, and the voice of your employer. I was wondering what to do to get past you and attempt to spy upon them, and then Smatt helped me out by summoning you. Do you recollect, when you dismissed me

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and entered the inner office, you saw me leaving the outer office? Yes, you did—not. You had no sooner closed the inner office-door behind you than I was at the keyhole.

"I tried first to overhear. Nothing doing. Couldn't distinguish but an occasional word. Then, I placed my eye to the keyhole. I saw you standing before the desk, Ichi staring at you, and Smatt addressing you. I saw Smatt hand over the envelope. I was morally certain it contained the code, from the care Smatt exercised and the interest Ichi showed. Then you started for the door, and I had to beat a hasty retreat. I guess I reached the hallway about the same instant you opened the door from the inner office."

"I felt your presence!" cried Martin, recalling of a sudden his feeling of that moment the previous afternoon. "I remember I looked out——"

"—Into the hall," finished Little Billy. "Yes—I was concealed around the corner of the cross corridor. I saw you. I left the building at a double quick and made for the water-front. I went aboard and told Ruth and the Captain what I had discovered. Then Ruth and I went ashore.

"I was sure you had the code in your possession, and I had overheard enough to know that you were to deliver the envelope to somebody, some place, last night. So, you were the unconscious burden of our thoughts, the prospective victim of our wiles.

"I had obtained your name from the janitor of the office building, by pretending I was searching for a friend who worked in one of the offices. Consultation of the city directory gave us your home address, and we headed in that direction. First, though, we picked up the bosun, hard by where I had deserted him. His condition was rather bibulous, but owing to his hollow legs and ivory dome, he was clear-headed and able to fall in with our plans. A shrewd-enough person is the bosun, an actor of no mean ability. His strategy served us well in the evening.

"Well, having the bosun, we set forth to gather information concerning your own estimable self. We went to your boarding-house. I donned the rôle of census-taker for the new city directory, and interviewed the chatty Mrs. Meagher. From her I learned the names and occupations of all the boarders in the house; specifically, I was informed of your orphaned and comparatively friendless condition, your age, your lodge, your studious habits, and your very, very respectable residence. From another source we later learned of your adorable curly brown hair, your calm, gray eyes, your strange aversion for the dangerous sex, even though they be 'puffick loidies.' A fellow lodger of yours gave us most of our information—or, let us say, a companion lodger. A lady, a 'puffick loidy,' a gimlet-eyed and talkative maiden, with a glorious crown of golden hair—though, alas, I fear 'tis a drug-store gold."

"Good Lord—Miss Pincher!" exclaimed Martin.

He felt his ears burning, and knew he was blushing. Confound that manicure girl! "Adorable hair—calm eyes" indeed! He shot a glance to Ruth. She was laughing at his discomfiture.

"We discovered she lodged in your house and we trailed her to the beauty parlor where she labors. Ruth pumped her."

"Oh, you are a fine favorite of hers," rallied Ruth. "She swears by you, Mr. Blake. I happened to casually mention your name, and she was charmed by the coincidence of your being a mutual friend. She gave you a very fine character indeed, though, she hated to admit, you were not as gallant as you might be. 'Regular goop with goils,' I believe she said."

"Silly little mush-head," mumbled Martin, greatly confused. "Suppose she told you everything she knew about me."

"Yes, and then some," remarked Little Billy. "Oh, Ruth has your entire history, Martin Blake. But I would not blush about it. Indeed, if my record were as good as yours, I would straighten my back. Ruth came out of that beauty-parlor with a record that goes something like this: very good-looking, muscular, studious, poor but honest, does not drink or smoke to excess, though has been known to swear violently and indulge in combat on occasion of coal-man flogging horse up a hill, is impervious to wiles of beskirted siren, be her hair ever so yellow, and her eyes ever so blue.

"Frankly, we were disappointed by your uncompromising rectitude, friend Martin. We were, you see, greatly desirous of obtaining that envelope you had in your pocket. We had hoped to discover some weakness, some vice, in your composition—a

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fondness for drink, or for women, or for cards—something we might use as a leverage to pry loose from you that envelope. We failed in our quest, and we had to abandon our safe scheme of cunning in favor of more direct and violent methods.

"We hired an automobile for the day—I'll wager that garage man was peevish when he discovered his machine abandoned in an alleyway, today—and Ruth and the bosun departed for that neighborhood that lodged you. I waited around the office, and when you left I trailed you home.

"I met Ruth and bosun, and we hit upon a plan. I went to a clothing store and purchased a suit of men's clothes, and overcoat, and a cap. Ruth donned them in the privacy of the car. Then, she and I took up our position in the dark doorway of the vacant house next door to you."

"Why, I recall! I saw a chap in a gray overcoat!" cried Martin.

"On the steps as you came out of the house," supplemented Little Billy. "Yes, that was Ruth. You came out before we expected you, and we were not prepared. You see, we had decided to hold you up. I was to shove a revolver in your face, and Ruth was to relieve you of the envelope. Your popping out so unexpectedly upset us.

"Ruth sneezed, and attracted your attention, and then she lost her wits and beat it down the street. If you had looked more keenly into that doorway next door, you would have seen yours-truly lurking nervously there. But you went straightway down the street yourself, and, in truth, I was not sorry that accident spoiled our coup. Neither Ruth, nor I, liked very well the idea of sticking up that active-appearing and uncertain quantity termed 'Martin Blake,' not to mention our scruples anent law-breaking violence.

"Well, the hold-up was off. Ruth beat you to the corner, and informed the waiting bosun of the failure. The bosun was properly valorous. He would attend to the 'blasted law shark.' So, while Ruth sought refuge in the automobile, the bosun lay in wait for you by the corner. He was to grasp you in those enormous hands of his, subdue you properly, and extract the treasure from your pocket—Ruth had told him which pocket.

"But, friend Martin, your penchant for making friends on sight saved you. The bosun's scheme was to pick a quarrel with you, but when you encountered him, your courtesy disarmed him. He confided this morning that you were 'such a proper little lad, I didn't 'ave the 'eart to 'it 'im.' So, to gain time, and to boost his courage, he carted you into the saloon and bought you a drink. And a good thing he did; otherwise we would have been in ignorance of Wild Bob Carew's joining this game. Ay, and Ruth might have disappeared and left us in ignorance of her fate!"

A SUDDEN, forcible, inelegant oath, ripped forth by the blind Captain, startled the group. It was not an epithet to use before a woman—though Martin did not think of that at the moment, nor did Ruth appear shocked. Martin was surprised by the wild rage that suddenly suffused Captain Dabney's serene countenance.

"I'll make that renegade hound pay!" swore the Captain, thumping the table in emphasis. "I told him I'd kill him if he bothered Ruth again. By Heaven, blind though I be, I'll keep my word! I'll see him, and recognize him, when we meet—the lying cur!"

The outburst ceased as suddenly as it had commenced, and the Captain's working features assumed instantly their accustomed immobile serenity. Martin noticed that the hunchback's face was sober, and that Ruth's face was white. He judged that the Captain was not indulging in vain boasting.

"Wild Bob Carew is the jinx of the happy family," said Little Billy, after a moment. "He is a human devil right enough. And the discovery that he is interested in this affair was serious and important news for us. I understand it took the wind out of the bosun's sails for a moment. You see, before your conversation with the bosun in that little tavern we did not know where you were taking the envelope. You mentioned 'Carew' and 'Black Cruiser,' and we were enlightened.

"But the bosun failed in his undertaking, after all. He slipped on the floor, and your agility saved you. You hopped a street-car and escaped the bosun's clutches.

"You didn't shake us off, though. We picked up the bosun, and followed you in the machine, keeping your car in sight the entire way to the Ferry Building. During the journey, the bosun communicated his news. At the Ferry we shot ahead of you,

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ditched the machine in an alleyway, and prepared the new plan I had evolved.

"I dodged into a pawn-shop and bought a legal-sized envelope and some sheets of paper. Then I doubled back ahead of you and awaited your coming, perching myself on a handy fire-hydrant. The rest you know. My eloquence charmed you, and while you so kindly encircled me with your arm, to keep me from falling, I picked your pocket of the treasure and substituted the trash I had prepared.

"Such was our campaign against the person of Martin Blake. You went on and entered the dive. I dodged across to the wharf where the bosun and, I thought, Ruth, were awaiting me in the brig's dingey. I found the bosun, but not Ruth. She had been too curious to remain in safety. She had left the bosun in charge of the boat and taken up a position where she could watch my operations."

"Not altogether curiosity — I had a scheme of my own in case you failed," broke in Ruth.

"Well, your scheme got you into a pretty fix," retorted Little Billy. "I was nervous because of the proximity of Carew to Ruth," he continued to Martin, "and I straightway set out to look for her. I came abreast the Black Cruiser just in time to see a certain young gentleman in a gray overcoat being hustled through the saloon's side entrance, by a group of suspiciously chunky-appearing men. I heard no outcry, but I knew that Ruth was in Carew's toils."

"I couldn't cry out," said Ruth. "One of those yellow runts had a jiu-jitsu hold upon my neck. My speech was paralyzed for the instant. Indeed, I could hardly walk. They practically carried me into Carew's presence."

"I saw you, in the hall," broke in Martin.

"I didn't see you," replied Ruth. "Indeed, I hardly recall passing through a hall. I came to my senses when they brought me into a big, lighted room, where Carew sat behind a table. I was—" the girl paused uncertainly, and Martin saw her face was white and strained — "I was frightened. There is no use my disguising the fact—that man terrifies me. He is—he is——"

"He is a scoundrel!" exploded Captain Dabney.

"Yes, but a courageous and resourceful scoundrel," commented Little Billy. He turned to Martin and continued: "Bob Carew is not a new acquaintance of ours. We have had trouble with him before. He is, er——"

"He is possessed of the idea that he loves me," Ruth quietly continued Little Billy's stammering words. "And he is a man who acts upon his ideas. He has made my life miserable for four years. Oh, I am afraid of that man! He is so determined and ruthless. And I would rather be dead than mated with that heartless wretch!"

"Aye, and I would rather see you dead," commented Captain Dabney. "Carew's life smells to heaven. He is more odorous than those yellow men who own him."

"If you knew the Pacific, you would know Carew," explained Little Billy to Martin. "He is the best and least favorably known blackleg between the two poles. He is an Englishman—the cast-off son of some noble house, I believe. And he is a cruel, treacherous, brave, and cunning beast! No other words fit him. Add to that a really beautiful body, a brazen gall, and a well-bred and suave carriage, and you have Wild Bob. He has an apt nickname—'Wild Bob.'

"The man has come through more wild, disreputable escapades than any other three men afloat. He has robbed right and left all over the Pacific. Half the island capitals are closed to him. He robbed the captain, here, when the captain first knew and trusted him. Two years ago, his schooner the *Aileen* was confiscated by the United States government for opium-running into California. Since that time he has been employed on shares by the same syndicate of Japs who have bought the captain's furs. They gave him the *Yezo*, which he renamed the *Dawn*, the fastest little schooner in the north and south Pacific, and he has been poaching seal for them, up north."

"Aye, and next year he would have ruined my trade, had not their spy cleared out with your secret," rumbled the captain.

"Yes, I have no doubt those gentlemen in Hakodate placed Ichi aboard to spy out our trading secrets," assented Little Billy. "And Ichi's learning of the million in ambergris awaiting an owner up there in Bering Sea upset their little plan. Ichi fled to Frisco, instead of to Japan, as we thought. He knew Carew and the schooner were in Frisco, and I suppose he turned to Smatt for assistance in deciphering the code, and also in preparing the *Dawn* for sea. Carew

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could not have attended to that personally. He has to keep under cover in United States territory. I hazard the guess, Blake, that you are not acquainted with all the activities of Mr. Smatt?"

"No," admitted Martin. "Smatt is a very secretive man. All I know of his affairs I learned from handling his court papers; but I know he has many interests I am entirely ignorant of. For instance, I did not know what brought Dr. Ichi to the office, though he and Smatt were very chummy. I thought it was business connected with the Nippon Trading Company. Smatt is American counsel for a Japanese firm of that name. I never heard of the *Dawn*, nor of Carew, before yesterday."

"I guess we are better posted concerning your former employer than you, yourself," informed Little Billy. "Smatt's name is a byword with the Pacific traders — the shrewd old spider! 'Nippon Trading Company' is the same syndicate we have done business with; and those yellow financiers of Hakodate and Tokyo have many irons in the fire besides the fur iron. Opium and coolie smuggling into California—both very profitable. And old Smatt looks after their American interests, fixes officials, keeps them clear of the law. It was Smatt who rescued Carew two years ago.

"I have no doubt that immediately on receipt of Ichi's intelligence, Smatt set about outfitting Carew for a trip to Fire Mountain. But I don't know whether the attempted shanghaiing of Ruth was premeditated or not. Of course, they knew of our presence in the port, and they may have been waiting for a chance to pick up Ruth—aside from Carew's mad infatuation, they may have expected to force from Ruth the latitude and longitude of Fire Mountain. I would not put a planned kidnaping beyond them. But it doesn't seem probable in the light of our undisturbed efforts to filch the code from you."

"No, I am sure my capture was not the result of forethought," stated Ruth. "I think they just noticed me standing steadfastly in the same position, just across the street from their rendezvous, and naturally they concluded I was a spy of some sort. Indeed, Carew's exclamation, when they brought me before him, is convincing proof that he did not know whom his men had bagged. 'My word, it is my spitfire, Ruth!' he cried. I acted the spitfire, too, and I am afraid I said some very unladylike things to him. But he only laughed in high glee. I was horribly frightened, though I took care he didn't suspect it. I know he meant to take me to sea with him.

"I only faced him for a few moments. There was an interruption from the hall, a banging and a knocking——"

"I did that, kicking a door," said Martin.

"I thought it was Little Billy, also captured," went on Ruth. "I was desperate. And Carew had me thrust into that other room, and the door secured upon me. I heard a commotion and quarreling without, and somebody was thrown into the room next to me. I thought it was Billy, and I tried to communicate by raps. You know, Billy and I have become quite expert in the use of that code; we practised on the passage up from the islands. You could not answer me, so I knew it was not Little Billy who had been imprisoned in the next room. I waited patiently and fearfully, until Billy burst open the window."

"Yes, we didn't lose any time starting our rescue," added Little Billy. "When I saw them haul Ruth into the house, I rushed back to the boat and told the bosun. We reconnoitered. We saw a taxi drive up in front of the saloon, and Carew storm out, and drive off."

"I guess he was bound to see Smatt about the blank sheets of paper in the envelope," said Martin. "I swore up and down that they had been placed there by Smatt."

"Yes, we guessed as much," responded Little Billy. "Well, we encircled the building, discovered that back shed, and decided to try and force entrance from the rear. I hustled back to where we had left our automobile, and got a small steel bar from the tool-box. When I rejoined the bosun, we mounted to the roof of the shed and tackled the windows.

"Luck was with us. Your separate prisons were in the rear of the house. We had a narrow squeak of it, though. Wild Bob returned before we had freed Ruth—that was that engine noise that startled us, Martin—and Wild Bob lived up to his reputation by that vicious pursuit he gave us.

"We won aboard safely, yanked up the hook and slipped out with the tide, without waiting for pilot or clearance. And so—well, now you know all. Remains nothing but for us to extend you a formal welcome to the bosom of the happy family."

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MARTIN became suddenly aware that the recital was ended, and that three unlike, friendly faces were beaming upon him with smiling lips. Unconsciously, as he had followed the course of the tale with absorbed interest, he had lost sight of the fact of his own intimate connection with the narrated events. He had seemed to be a listener to an interesting fiction. His old habit of identifying himself with the characters in the tales he read, had mastered him. Little Billy's recountal, and his own responses and interjections, all seemed part of a melodrama which, played out, would vanish and leave him secure in his accustomed law-abiding world.

Now he suddenly realized that the melodrama was real, that the first act only was ended, and that the last was obscured in the future.

The day had been replete with shocks, but the greatest shock was this, when Martin finally and completely realized that the even course of his life had been rudely and permanently changed, that he had been plucked out of his humdrum niche and cast willy-nilly into this violent drama by sportive circumstance. The tumultuous incidents of the previous night arrayed themselves in his mind with something of their true perspective.

He touched his head, and felt the bandage about the forgotten wound. He became more keenly conscious of his surroundings —the unfamiliar furnishings of the cabin, the careened table, the motion of the ship that had at first disturbed and now soothed him, the measured footfalls of the boatswain, overhead, the sough of the wind aloft.

He looked with fresh eyes upon his companions. They too were actors in the play —the forceful blind man, the lovable cripple, and this blooming, merry-eyed girl whose every glance sent a strange thrill through his being. They were his partners, his shipmates! He was committed with them to this adventure, and he was glad. They, too, seemed glad, for they were smiling a welcome.

"Of course, Martin, we feel rather diffident before you," spoke up Little Billy. "We know it is an outrage, this causing you to lose your comfortable berth ashore, and——"

"Say no more about it," interrupted Martin. "You had sufficient provocation for all your actions. And really, believe me, I am very glad I fell in with you. I am glad to be here. I have wanted to go to sea all my life. We are going to Fire Mountain now, aren't we?"

"That's the spirit!" cried the captain heartily. "And you will not lose by your joining us, lad. Even if this venture prove a failure, there is still a mighty good living to be picked up on the Pacific."

"We are a sort of co-operative association," explained Ruth. "We work on shares; something like the whaleman's lay, though more generous. Of course, we pay straight wages to the hands forward. But we of the afterguard work this way: After all expenses of a voyage have been paid, the captain, as master and owner, takes fifty per cent. of the net profits. The remaining fifty per cent. is divided among the rest of us, not according to rank but pro rata. We want you to join the partnership. You are to share equally with Billy, the bosun, and myself. And if we really find this stuff on Fire Mountain, your share will come to a neat fortune. No, don't start protesting—of course you are entitled to it."

"And don't commence counting your chickens before they are hatched," admonished Little Billy. "It is quite on the cards that we will reach Fire Mountain to discover Carew ahead of us. Or somebody else may have happened upon the stuff during the twenty-five years since Winters died. The last is not probable, but the first is, at least, possible. It will not do for us to rest in false security. Carew and his backers are sure to have a try for that million on Fire Mountain."

"But he does not know the island's position. I am sure of that!" objected Ruth.

"But he does know Bering Sea, almost as well as I," spoke up Captain Dabney. "And he knows the particular corner of Bering we are bound for. No—Billy is right. We must not imagine the *Dawn* isn't on our heels, even now. In any event, he would be setting out for the Kuriles to pick up the seal-herds, about this time; and, knowing Carew as we do, we may prophesy that he will try to find our island. Indeed, the man may have already run across Fire Mountain during his excursions in those waters—he may know its position as well as we do. He'll try to poach on our preserve, no fear.

"That ambergrease would represent the profits of a score of seal-raids—and besides,

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there is you, Ruth, drawing him like a lodestone. His attempt to shanghai you, back there in Frisco, shows the temper of the man. If we meet the *Dawn* up north, and I have a hunch we shall meet her, we want to keep our eyes open. Meanwhile, we want to make a smart passage, and get there first, and away. We want to carry on—by the Lord, crack on to the limit!"

"If it has come to a race, Carew's schooner has the heels of us," observed Little Billy.

"Yes, the *Dawn* is the better sailer," reluctantly admitted the captain. "If the *Cohasset* were ten years younger, I wouldn't admit it, but the old girl isn't quite as limber as she used to be. But the log line isn't everything in an ocean race. I know Bob Carew is a good seaman, but I'll show him a trick or two this passage, for all that I'm a blind man!"

"I hope we don't meet him up north. I am afraid," muttered Ruth.

"But haven't you considered that the police may have grabbed Carew, and the rest of that gang, for their part in that street fight?" broke in Martin. "Of course, I didn't see the finish of that affair, but I remember that I saw the police coming just before I fell."

"The police! Lay Carew by the heels!" The captain shook his head. "No such good luck, I'm afraid. Trust Carew to win clear of the police every time."

"And if they did grab him, you may trust Lawyer Smatt to have procured his release, at least upon bail, ere now. There is the hope, of course, that when you, Martin, shied that gun into his face, he was badly injured," said Little Billy.

"Oh, I hope not!" ejaculated Martin.

"We hope so," went on Little Billy. "If you had killed him, you would have rendered mankind a service. No such luck, though—the devil never fails to look after his own. He may not have even been stunned. The bosun did not see what happened after you fell—he picked you up and turned tail and ran for it. But I have no doubt Carew's men gathered up their leader and made off ahead of the law's coming. Carew is too much the fox not to have had a getaway prepared; and the clearance we dumped off the Farallones showed that he had the *Dawn* ready for sea. I'll wager we didn't beat him out through the Gate by many hours!"

"I suppose the police are looking for us?" ventured Martin.

"Not likely," assured the other. "We are safe away, at any rate. But I doubt if they have even heard of the *Cohasset*. The denizens of that groggery would have given no evidence against us—they are themselves too deeply implicated. Also, shooting affrays are common enough on the Frisco water-front, even gunfights of such magnitude as we indulged in. The police will forget all about it within a week's time.

"Of course, if we had left you behind, to be arrested, the consequences might have been serious enough for you, providing you did not have money or influence. That is the main reason we brought you to sea with us. But as it is, a dead or wounded Jap does not amount to much in Frisco, and the affair will have slipped men's minds long ere we see Market Street again."

"But—I think I killed that man, Spulvedo!" urged Martin, with a qualm at the recollection.

"A good job if you did," was the reply. "He was a notorious scoundrel. If you snuffed him out, I suspect the police would feel inclined to vote you a medal. But don't feel badly about that incident, Blake. Remember, you dropped him in self-defense."

"Gentlemen!" broke in Ruth suddenly. "We will have to adjourn this meeting till another time. Seven bells went some time ago. I have just time to get my coffee and relieve the bosun by midnight."

"What—the watch gone!" cried the captain. "But, lass, you have had no rest."

"Small matter," asserted the girl, rising. "I'll make up for it. Is there any change in course, captain?"

"No, make all the westing we can," said the captain. "If this breeze will only hold a couple of days longer, we'll pick up the trades. Then for the passage!"

"But—a second!" exclaimed Little Billy. "We have not yet assigned our new brother to his duties. You know, Blake, there are no drones in the happy family. Now, I suggest, you are eminently qualified to assist the hard-driven steward."

A hearty laugh from the girl and the old man checked the hunchback's speech.

"No, you are not going to sluff your job upon poor Mr. Blake's shoulders!" cried Ruth. "That is—unless he wishes to become a steward."

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"I want to be a sailor," Martin asserted emphatically.

"Well said, lad—I know you have mettle," commented Captain Dabney. "But it means work. You can not learn a sailor's work by pacing a poop-deck."

"I am more than willing to work—common sailor work," said Martin.

"Well, we'll assign you to a watch," said the old man. "Of course, you will live aft. Keep your present berth with Billy. You had better join the starboard watch, I think. The bosun is a great hand to break in a greenhorn."

But Martin objected to this disposition. He was watching Ruth. She was buttoning her pea-coat around her throat, preparatory to braving the raw night. There was, he dared to think, a welcome twinkle, a meaning message, in the sidewise glance she shot at him.

"I would rather be in the mate's watch," said Martin.

The captain grinned, Little Billy chuckled and muttered something about a "sheep to the slaughter," and the mate rewarded him with a flash of white teeth.

"I'll be glad to have you in my watch," she said. "But remember—it is all work and no play! I keep strict discipline in my watch!"

Martin then proposed to commence straightway his seaman's career, by standing the impending watch, by accompanying Ruth on deck. Thereupon his officer voiced her first command:

"I don't want you blundering about the decks tonight with that sore head. Time enough for you to start in the morning; after breakfast I'll examine the wound, and if it looks well I'll turn you to. Also, you need to visit the slop-chest." She pointed to his once natty, now bedraggled, business suit. "You are hardly dressed for facing weather. Billy will outfit you in the morning. Meanwhile, turn in and sleep."

TO BE CONCLUDED

AN OLD FRIEND

By PERCY WAXMAN

THERE'S a useless old horse in my paddock
That no one's permitted to ride.
He's as plump and rotund as a shaddock—
Does nothing but eat—darn his hide!

His years are about twenty-seven;
He limps and his withers aren't right.
But no two-year-old this side of heaven
Compares with that horse in my sight.

Though he's ancient, decrepit and wheezy,
Though today he can't run very fast
There's a long trip for me he makes easy—
He can trot me right back to the past.

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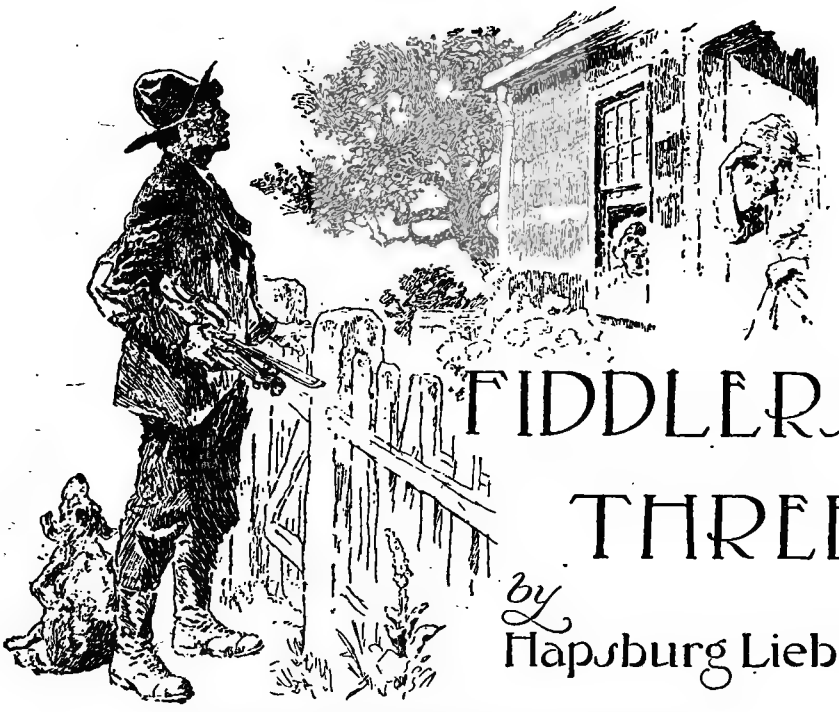

FIDDLERS THREE

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Man-Breaker," "The One Way Out," etc.

FOR SIX months Bub Ansley, Tennessee mountaineer, had made his home in a cave. It was not wholly from choice, not wholly through necessity, that he did this.

The cave was dry at all times, never too warm and never too cold; from its mouth one had a plain view of many square miles of foothills and lowlands. This latter-named was a thing that suited Ansley perfectly, for there were certain men who very much wanted to lay their hands on him. In the daytime those men could not approach the laurel-rimmed hole high up in the breast of the majestic Blackfern without being seen; there was but one who could climb the extremely rugged and precipitous mountainside at night, and that one was Bub himself.

Ansley's friends unhesitatingly called him the finest and the fairest timberjack fighter and the best fiddler on earth, and they sometimes added that no man ever had a warmer heart or a higher temper; his enemies just as unhesitatingly declared that he was a rattlesnake, or a copperhead, or a viper. Men of Bub Ansley's caliber are never merely liked or disliked—they are either loved or hated, always.

At the bottom of the thing that put the hounds of the law on Ansley's trail was his good heart and his hot-headedness.

He had been sent to Johnsville in the lowlands for logging-camp supplies, and there he saw a policeman leading through a jeering crowd a little man who had been drinking; the little man protested at the officer's rough treatment, and the officer used his locust brutally. Ansley, ever a lover of the square deal, interfered, and at that psychological moment the policeman kicked the mountaineer's dog. Ansley promptly knocked the officer down.

Another policeman and a deputy-sheriff ran up, and Ansley himself was clubbed and arrested. But before he had been taken halfway to Johnsville's jail he turned on the two men who had him in charge, whipped them both and took their revolvers; then he called to his dog, shot out a few plate-glass windows on Johnsville's main street, and ran for his native hills.

A party of armed men followed in hot pursuit. Bub disabled three of them—when

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he might have killed them with less trouble —and made good his escape. And so it came about that, partly from choice and partly through necessity, Bub Ansley lived in a cave.

The cave was as well furnished as Bub wanted it; which is to say that it was hardly furnished at all. At the base of one of the stone walls was a cotton bag containing provisions; beside it was a blanket nicely folded; on the blanket lay a good old sycamore-and-spruce fiddle in a cheap case.

Bub still wore loggers' boots with spikes in their soles, clay-colored corduroys, a blue flannel shirt open at the throat, a broad-rimmed gray felt hat. A strong and powerful, big young man was Bub Ansley.

He sat on a flat stone that lay before the cave's mouth, a stone that he had come to think of as his front porch, and beside him sat the ever-faithful and adoring black-and-yellow cur. It was a clear day in early Summer, and on the uneven stretches below the mountains everlasting flaunted their gay dress of redbud flowers, waxen white laurel bloom, golden yellow wild honeysuckle, pink-eyed ivy.

Bub's big brown eyes drank in thoughtfully the purple distances, then his gaze settled upon a gray speck down in the foothills. That speck was a weather-beaten log cabin, and in it lived the young woman that Bub Ansley dreamed of every time he slept. He had never spoken to her; he did not even know her name. He had only seen her at one of the cabin windows.

He had seen her there a dozen times. He had passed the cabin on purpose, that he might see her at the window. She had smiled at him; he had smiled at her.

She was pretty, charmingly pretty; but there was something infinitely sad, something that made him think of hopelessness, about her face. Her eyes had told him plainly, even while she was smiling, of longing and of long suffering.

Bub turned to his dog. A thought of more or less magnitude had occurred to him.

"S'posen we goes down thar and fiddles a little for her; eh, Spotty?" he drawled. "Everybody allus liked to hear us fiddle, didn't they, Spotty?"

The dog capered joyfully. Ansley rose, and two more minutes saw him moving slowly down the rugged breast of the great Blackfern. He carried his fiddle under his arm, and he went without slipping, sure-footed as a panther. The cur followed at his heels.

ANSLEY had reached a point within fifty yards of the gray cabin, when he was brought up short by the tones of an instrument like that which he carried under his arm—and the music came from the primitive habitation ahead of him! He went on, drawn irresistibly, toward the window. Soon he saw a head of coppery hair that caught the gold out of the sunlight and held it; soon he saw that it was the girl of his dreams that was playing—she too was a fiddler! The air was a simple one; it was old Natchez Under the Hill. Bub himself played it frequently; but he had never been able to put a divine note into it, as the girl was doing. It was sorrow, that note; though Bub didn't know that.

The playing ceased. The coppery head bent almost out of sight below the window-ledge. Bub Ansley, a strange feeling rising within him, turned to his dog. Spotty looked up at his master.

"Onless it was me, I never knowed a fiddler who didn't have a good heart," he smiled. "So le's go on and see her; eh, Spotty?"

Spotty capered. Bub went on, with his fiddle under his arm. At the dilapidated gate of split palings he stopped and hallooed gently. The girl's sad face appeared at the window. An almost pitifully little and stooped old woman in dark-figured calico, with a red bandanna about her white head, came to the door and shaded her sunken eyes with a wrinkled hand.

"Who're you?" she demanded, rather than asked, in a voice that was cracked and shrill.

The answer came promptly, fully:

"I'm Bub Ansley, o' the Ironhead Mountain Ansleys, people 'at never bent their knees to nothin' but the Almighty, a good woman, or a groundhawg's hole; I'm twenty-five year old in the Fall, and I weigh a hunderd and eighty-eight pound; by trade I'm a timberjack, and by perfession I'm a fiddler, and I'm a hard-shelled Baptist and a Democrat. What I want to know is this: Can me and my dawg come in?"

"Shore," the old woman shrilled. "Shore, come in. La, la, and la, la! Yes, come right on, Bub Ansley, a course!"

Bub went into the gray, poorly furnished

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cabin. Another moment, and he found himself standing before the girl of the coppery hair. She sat in a home-made rocker, and her fiddle lay in her lap; she wore a rather long, freshly-laundered dress of cheap white percale dotted sparsely with blue.

Bub introduced himself awkwardly. It was easier to fight a logging-camp bully than to face this girl. Somehow he felt coarse, mean and brutal under the steady gaze of her wistful chestnut-brown eyes.

"My name's Nan Paintor," she told him in the soft drawl of the hills. "We moved here from Nawth Ca'liner a few weeks ago. We thought we had kinfolks here, but—well, we hain't. The's jest Granny Paintor and me."

Her grandmother went to the kitchen. Bub sat down in a chair that creaked under his weight. He fiddled for Nan, and she fiddled for him. Inside of two little hours they became better acquainted than most couples become after two years of constant association. Then Nan drew Bub's heart out with "Silver Threads," and almost before he knew it Bub was bending over her, with one of her hands in one of his hands.

"You're in some sort o' bad trouble," he blurted, "and I'm a-goin' to git ye out of it."

Nan turned a little pale and shrank from him slightly. He was so big and so overpowering now.

"By what right ha' you got to he'p me?" she muttered.

"God's own right," answered Bub Ansley. "I love ye, Nan. Sence that blessed minute when I fust seed yore face at the window thar, I've loved ye, Nan. Now tell me this—what's the matter? And tell me this, too—do ye think ye could ever come to l-love me some?"

Nan Paintor sobbed chokingly and hid her face against Bub's great shoulder, and that was the answer to his second question—she loved him already. Bub kissed her with a deep reverence, and then she answered his first question:

"Nobody much ever loved me afore, but Granny. And now I feel like I could die easy any time, acause a reel man has loved me and kissed me and held my hand in his. Bub, honey, I hate to tell ye, but we cain't never marry. You couldn't afford to have me for a wife. Acause I—and now you'll know why it is I set thar at the window 'most all the time—I'm havin' to go through wi' life as a cripple! I hain't walked nary step for goin' on to two year."

Like the big man he was, Bub Ansley hid the sharp sting that ran into and through his heart, smiled and kissed her again.

"Didn't I know it? Didn't I know ye was crippled?" He lied beautifully. "I thought the' was somethin' else a-worryin' ye, Nan, little darlin'. I—I——"

In spite of himself, he suddenly floundered in his speech. There had come to his mind remembrance of the fact that he was an outlaw; that the hands of all the law-abiding world were against him; and that he had no real right to the love of even crippled Nan.

He sought Granny Paintor, found her, and led her masterfully to the weedy yard behind the cabin.

"I've got to know," he said, "what's Nan's trouble?"

"Her knee's been broke," answered the old woman. "Two year ago, might' nigh. She fell outen a tree. A young bird had tumbled outen its nest, and Nan she clim the tree to put it back. It was a' onholy, black shame! Her a cripple for life! Bub Ansley, I hates like burnin' —— to say it, but I mistrusts me the goodness o' the Lord, sometimes!"

"Now shet that up," snapped Ansley, frowning. Irreverence had never been one of his sins. "Go and git on yore old knees in a hogwaller mudhole and ax the Lord to forgive ye for bein' sech a' old fool like ye are. But—well, I reckon I'd oughtn't o' said jest that——"

Granny Paintor broke down, sank to the weeds and covered her face with her palsied hands. Tearfully she told Bub of all she had borne, of how she had starved herself, and lied and lied to poor Nan when there was so little food in their larder. Lastly she told of the supreme disappointment at not finding their kinspeople in Tennessee. And now—even now—she could not invite him to stay for supper because there was nothing to eat in the house.

"The'll be a plenty for ye to eat here afore suppertime, I'll gyarantee," said Ansley. "Now listen. Le's git smack down to business. Have ye ever took Nan to any town doctors?"

"I ain't never had no money much, and I never could git it," mumbled Granny Paintor.

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"Ye don't need no money," declared Bub. "Listen here. The's a pow'ful smart doctor down at the Johnsville hawspital. Thar's whar Super Bill Cole used to send his crippled-up timberjacks, to Doctor Henry Call. Doctor Henry he can take a man's insides out and put a mule's insides in their place, and the man'll live and eat hay. Many's the time I've fished and hunted with him, and I happen to know he's as smart as a fiddlestring. Listen here. You le' me be the boss. Soon in the mornin' you and me starts for the Johnsville hawspital and Doctor Henry wi' Nan. Do ye git that? I'll tote her in my arms. 'Tain't but about twenty mile, and 'at ain't no walk. I betch'e Doctor Henry can fix Nan's knee—shore, I know he can!"

The old woman looked up. At last a bright ray of hope had come to pierce the black darkness of her old heart's despair. Bub stooped, caught her under the arms and lifted her to her feet.

"I'll leave my fiddle here, and hurry atter somethin' to eat," he said. "You go and tell Nan what we're a-goin' to do for her. Come on, Spotty!"

He went to his cave and carried all the provisions he had to the cabin of the Paintors.

When he went to his cave again, the golden sun of early Summer was sinking beyond a faraway fringe of tree-tops in the lowland. He sat himself down on the flat stone that lay at the entrance to his quarters, and began to think.

His going to Johnsville, he knew, was fraught with danger. The hounds of the law were apt to find him out and arrest him, and then he would have to spend at least ten years, the ten best years of his life, in the State penitentiary. And yet, the risk, the gamble of it, appealed strongly to his red-blooded nature. . . .

It was true, Nan could go to the hospital without him. He could carry her to some lowland farmer's home; he had enough money to hire the farmer to take Nan in a spring wagon to Doctor Henry. But—Nan would receive better attention, he believed, if he went with her and saw the doctor personally. To send a note to his friend the surgeon was impossible, for the very simple reason that he couldn't write.

Just as the last of the sun disappeared behind the lowland tree-tops, he turned to the black-and-yellow cur.

"Ef we got to Johnsville atter dark," he drawled, "nobody much ought 'o see us; the hawspital is out at the aidge o' town. Shore as shootin', Spotty, we're a-goin' to try it!"

Spotty wagged his tail and laughed out of his affectionate eyes. Talk to your dog if you want your dog to love you.

BAT DAYBREAK on the following morning, Bub Ansley rose in his cave and dressed himself hastily. Then he went down in the rosy light of dawn to a sparkling little creek, bathed his face and hands and dried them by means of a wide blue bandanna. Half an hour later he was rapping on the front door of the cabin of the Paintors.

And half an hour after that, he had breakfasted with the Paintors and was starting for the lowland with the girl Nan in his arms. The old woman walked along the laurel-bordered trail beside him, talking garrulously, and the happy dog Spotty ran on ahead and barked furiously at saucy boomer-squirrels.

By this time the sun was up; it burned a bright hole through the fringe of pines that grew along the crest of the great and rugged Blackfern, and made jewels of the dewdrops that clung to the green heads of the fox-tail grass. Short-winged forest birds twittered sweetly in the full-leaved trees, and wild bees hummed about the dainty white blossoms of the rattleweed.

More than once before they reached the level of the lowland Nan said to the big young man who carried her so carefully—

"I'm afeard you'll be awful tired."

And more than once Bub replied smilingly:

"Stuff! You don't weigh over a hunderd and twenty-five. Blast my eyes ef I cain't carry a hoss a little matter o' twenty mile!"

He labored bravely on, and always he tried bravely to conceal the fact that she was a burden that grew heavier with each passing mile. He was forced to rest himself now and then.

They stopped at a farmhouse for an hour at noontime, and the farmer's wife gave them a first-rate meal. The farmer accommodatingly put horses to a light wagon and took them five miles.

Just at nightfall Ansley wearily bore Nan Paintor up the stone steps that led to the electrically lighted veranda of Johnsville's

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general hospital. Doctor Henry Call himself came out to meet them.

The surgeon ushered them into the reception-room, and Bub put Nan down in a big and roomy rocker. Granny Paintor dropped weakly into another rocker. Bub remained standing. The dog Spotty, somehow afraid to enter that strange place, sat in the open doorway and wagged his tail diffidently.

Bub explained to the doctor.

"Pity she didn't have the proper treatment at first," frowned Doctor Call. "But I think we can put the knee to rights yet."

He faced Nan, who now seemed somewhat frightened.

"If you don't mind, I'll have you taken to another room, where I'll make an examination of the knee."

Nan flushed and glanced quickly toward the man she loved.

"Doctor Henry he's all right," Bub told her. "Leave everything to him."

"Whatever Bub says for me to do, that same I'll do," Nan said innocently, sweetly. "Bub he—he loves me——"

"Plumb to death," gallantly declared Ansley.

Two wholesome-looking, white-clad nurses came in, and Nan was taken to another room. Bub paced the floor anxiously, tired as he was, while he waited for the surgeon's report. Now and then he paused before Granny Paintor and whispered a word of assurance; now and then he smiled faintly at his dog, which still sat in the doorway and wagged its tail diffidently.

When Doctor Call came back to the reception-room, Bub Ansley read good hope on his countenance. The report came promptly:

"There is nothing broken. Her knee was twisted and thrown out of place, that's all. A little operation will make her as sound as ever."

"Thank God for that," mumbled weary Granny Paintor.

"About how long will she haf to stay here, Doc?" asked Bub.

"That depends. Two to four weeks."

Ansley led the doctor aside.

"About the pay," he began, when Doctor Call interrupted:

"You needn't worry about that, Bub. My fee is always the biggest part of the cost of an operation, and I won't make any charges for this. You will be given plenty of time for paying the hospital's bills. If you'll pardon me, Bub—er, hadn't you better get away from here? You might be arrested here, you know, at any minute. I'll find a place for the old woman to stay. And listen—if I were you, I'd make preparations to go West; I'd go to California and begin life over. And try to kill a little of that hotheadedness of yours; you'll get along better, you know. Understand, Bub, I don't bother to give advice to people unless I like 'em."

Before Bub could reply, a nurse approached.

"The young woman wishes to see Mr. Ansley before he goes."

"Follow her," said Doctor Call.

Bub followed the nurse. Another minute, and he was bending over Nan, who sat in one of the hospital's wheel-chairs.

"What is it, honey?" he whispered.

"I—I wanted you to kiss me afore you go, Bub," blushingly whispered Nan. "Ef anything was to happen to me or to you, we—we'd have it to remember."

Ansley knelt beside her. He could bend his knees to the Almighty or to a good woman. He felt now in his soul that he was bending his knees to both God and Nan Paintor. Her face went against his shoulder; her arms went around his neck.

He drew her to him, and bent his cheek to her fragrant, coppery hair. They tried to speak, and choked. Then Bub kissed her and rose, and went out walking as one half blind.

Spotty capered around his feet when he reached the veranda. Doctor Call waved a hearty, man-sized "So long!" to him.

"I'm shore much obliged to ye, Doc," Ansley muttered thickly.

With his dog at his heels, he crossed the hospital grounds and entered a thinly settled suburban street. Three big dark figures stole after him, and just as Spotty gave tongue to a growl of warning the bass voice of the county's high sheriff boomed out:

"Hands up, Ansley. We've got you. We'll kill you if you show fight."

More than one person had seen Ansley and recognized him during the afternoon. Somebody had told.

The mountaineer wheeled with a six-shooter in his right hand. In the glare of a nearby street electric he saw that three revolvers as big as his own were staring

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toward him with their murderous black eyes. They could hardly miss him if they fired; and unless he surrendered they would fire, he knew.

So he dropped his weapon and put up his hands. They took him to the strongest cell in the Johnsville jail. A special guard was placed in the corridor to make sure of his safe keeping; and by this Bub Ansley knew that they considered him a very desperate man. Crimes that he had not committed, he learned, had been placed at his door. Always, always it is like this.

Poor little black-and-yellow Spotty, having been denied entrance to the house of stone and iron, lay in the grass under his master's barred window and whined and shivered—though the June night was far from cold.

It was a signal victory for the law, and almost the whole of the town knew of it before another sun had fairly risen. Hundreds of townspeople hastened to the jail during that day for a glimpse of the notorious and terrible outlaw. Bub sat on his narrow bed and stared at the floor. Not even the wiles of a newspaper man from Knoxville could wring a word from his lips. What would Nan think of him? It was that which worried him most—what would Nan think of him? Wouldn't she say that he had been the blackest of villains to win her heart and then crush it? That which he had done for her was almost nothing: it was only one hard day's work. He was very unreasonable.

And his heart broke for his dog, too, which still lay in the grass under his cell window. When one of the sheriff's deputies brought his supper, he poked it between the bars to Spotty, and himself did without.

After suppertime Doctor Henry Call came to see him and brought news of Nan's successful operation. The doctor was very kind. He promised to see that Ansley had the best counsel available.

The next day one of the greatest criminal lawyers in Tennessee took charge of Bub's case.

Three more days passed, and Granny Paintor came to pay her respects to Bub Ansley. How was Nan? This was Bub's first question.

"Doin' all right," answered the little old woman. "Doin' fine. All but—but a-bein' plumb wild about you. Wisht I may die ef she hain't cried her eyes dang nigh out about you, Bub Ansley! When I left her to come to you, she said to me this here:

" 'Tell him ef I could write, I'd write to him. Tell him I feel like it's my fault about him a-bein' ketched. Tell him I'll love him until I die.' "

Bub Ansley straightened, and his big, strong hands gripped the hateful bars that separated him from Granny Paintor. So Nan blamed not him, but herself! The knowledge fell upon him like a swift, hard blow that gave both pleasure and pain.

"Tell Nan," he said when he could put speech to his tongue, " 'at it ain't none o' her fault about me a-bein' ketched. Tell her I'd write to her ef I could write. And tell her I'll love her until I die. Go and tell her!"

When Granny Paintor had gone, he laughed out of pure joy because Nan had no blame for him. There came a sudden great longing for his fiddle, that he might use it as the instrument of his heart's rejoicing. Not having the fiddle, he went to the window, pressed his face to the bars, and said happily to his dog:

"She ain't mad at us, old pardner! Now cavort!"

Spotty cavorted.

Bub did not have to wait long for the Summer session of court. In spite of one of the greatest fights his noted attorney ever put up for a client, Bub received a sentence of ten years at hard labor in the State penitentiary. Public sentiment ran high against Ansley. The jury believed he had committed crimes that his hands had never touched.

When the sheriff started with him for Nashville, Doctor Call took Nan Paintor to the station to see him off. Spotty, too, was there; and Bub knew that Nan would take care of Spotty. The farewell was both wordless and pitiful.

ANSLEY accepted his lot as well as any mountaineer could have accepted it. Prisons are so very hard for these wild, liberty-loving hearts that few of them survive a long term behind the grim gray walls. Ansley was fully determined that he would be a man, even there in the stripes; he hoped to have his sentence cut down somewhat on account of his good behavior.

He told the Senior Warden that he was

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handy with wood-working tools, and the Senior Warden put him in the carpenter's shop as an assistant. This pleased Bub greatly, for in the carpenter's shop he hoped to make for himself a fiddle. At the first opportunity he began it. He had found some dry maple for the back and sides of the instrument; but for the top there was nothing better than red cedar, and he should have had fine-grained spruce.

The days went by, and the fiddle grew little by little. He had to work on it at off hours, and there weren't so many off hours. They soon came to know him as "Ansley the Silent." He made but one friend, and that friend was the prison chaplain. He had his reasons for this. The chaplain brought him the pegs, finger-board, strings, tail-piece and bow he wanted so much.

Then a letter came to him from Doctor Henry Call. The letter stated that Nan was entirely well; that she was working in the hospital's dining-room; that she was learning fast to read and write; and that Granny Paintor and the dog Spotty were doing finely.

A month later Nan herself wrote to Bub. In all his twenty-five years a happier moment had never come to him than that moment which saw the missive placed in his hands. And yet—how was he to read it? And how was he to answer it?

He much disliked the idea of any one else's seeing Nan's letter to him; and he disliked equally the idea of any one else's writing to Nan for him. It threw him into a quandary deeper than any other quandary he had ever known. Then he decided to enlist the kindly aid of his one friend, the chaplain. On Sunday he stammered out his request to the prison minister.

The man in black declared he would be glad to render any assistance in his power to render. Bub gave him the missive with reluctant hands. He drew out the carefully folded sheets and read aloud the scrawling, misspelled words:

Derest bub i sete myself With pen in Hand to rite yu A few liens to let yu no i am wel hoapin yu The same. i am stil at the Hospitel worken in the Dinin rom. I am doen fine thanks To you bub honey. The man cook has got a funy name and he wares his Mustashes turned up strate And he ast Me to mary him and i tole him i wud mary the devel Fust. aint yu Glad i can Rede and Rite sos i can rite To yu. yu neen to tri to rite to Me ile Rite to yu evry weke. doctor henerys wife is Good to me she Sed ide be a dreme ef i Was drest up But i dont want to Be no dreme. bub Honey ile wait For yu ef its a Hunnerd year. Spoty is Al Rite and grany paintor to. nan p.

Now the minister was a man with a well-developed funny-bone, and in spite of himself he laughed. It enraged Ansley quickly. He snatched the letter from the chaplain's hands.

The chaplain hastened to offer an apology, but the apology didn't carry. He had laughed—he had *laughed*—at poor Nan's first letter!

Ansley strode away with his head high, and with his brown eyes snapping and full of fire. There wasn't any asking anybody to write to Nan for him now.

On the next day Ansley finished his fiddle. He had stained it brown and varnished it, and on the whole it was not a bad-looking instrument, though one could see that it was home-made. He put the strings into place and tightened them, and played "Natchez Under the Hill." The red cedar of its top was not sufficiently resonant for a great volume of sound, but it had a distinct and singular sweetness in its tones, new as it was. The work of Bub's hands drew quick and blinding tears to his eyes.

Then there came a thought that caused Bub Ansley to straighten like a god where he stood—since he couldn't write to his Nan, he would send her the fiddle as a token of his affection, as a message telling her of his undying love. She would know that he had made it himself; she would understand; she would understand, too, the great sacrifice.

So he sent the fiddle by express to Nan Paintor, in care of the general hospital at Johnsville, and the last cent he had went to paying the carriage charges. In this was the spirit that has sent other men smiling to the rack, the wheel, the cross.

NAN PAINTOR scrawled her name on the expressman's book in tremulous expectation. Who was there on earth that cared to send her anything, save Bub Ansley? She hurried to her little bedroom in the hospital's rear, put the package on her bed and unwrapped it. Two hours later Doctor Henry Call found her lying across the bed with the brown fiddle clasped to her breast. Her face was tear-stained and drawn. She understood, even as Bub had known that she would understand. She sat up and in broken sentences explained to the doctor.

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Doctor Henry folded his arms and began to pace the floor. Soon an idea of promise found life in his keen brain. Suddenly he lifted his eyebrows and turned to Nan.

"There is one power that can get Bub out," he said slowly, "and that power lies in the hands of the governor."

"But the gov'nor—he don't know nothin' about Bub and me," protested Nan, very gloomily. She was on her feet before the doctor now, and her eyes were wide with despair.

"Perhaps not," admitted the doctor. "But the governor, Nan, is a fiddler. They call him "The Fiddling Governor." You've heard of him? Of course. Who hasn't! There are those who say that he fiddled his way to the high place he now holds. Little girl, he's Tennessee's best-loved man. No man ever had a bigger heart. There is, however, one thing in the way of his pardoning Bub; he wants to be reelected in November, and the opposition is already playing up against him the fact that he has pardoned a great many convicts."

"I'm to take this fiddle, and go to the gov'nor at Nashville, and try to fiddle Bub out o' the penitentiary," murmured Nan. "Is that it?"

"Exactly!" smiled Doctor Henry. "And I'll go with you."

So to Nashville they went.

The doctor knew the State's chief executive, and they gained an audience with him without delay. Nan acknowledged the introduction awkwardly, and sat down in a great chair before the governor; she held the fiddle in her lap, and frequently she glanced toward Doctor Henry, Bub's friend, for reassurance. Doctor Call then told about Bub Ansley—of that which had outlawed him; of his taking the crippled girl to the hospital, and of his being caught; of his inability to write, and of the fiddle, that soulful message of everlasting love.

The chief executive looked toward the floor and was silent. Doubtless he was thinking of his chances for reelection; he knew, of course, that to pardon another man would be to sharpen the weapon with which the opposition was fighting him. Doubtless he fancied he could see the opposition's newspapers asking the public in heavy black headlines why penitentiaries were built.

Doctor Call looked toward Nan and nodded. Nan looked toward the governor and murmured softly—

"Would ye like to hear Bub's fiddle?"

The great executive did not answer. Since he did not object, Nan began to play, and she played as she had never played before. In turn she rendered "Natchez Under the Hill," "Buffalo Gals," "Old Millstream," "Silver Threads" and "Sewanee River." Shortly before she finished, the governor rose, walked to a window and stood there with his hands clasped behind him and with his head down—with his head down.

When Nan stopped playing, the governor faced about slowly.

"All of it was a sweet lament," he said. "I think I'd like to see the man who made that fiddle."

Less than an hour afterward they had entered the office of the senior prison warden, and Bub Ansley had been sent for. Ansley entered the office wonderingly. His eyes caught sight of Nan, and he ran to her, took her hand and kissed it and dropped on his knees—on his knees—at her feet.

"Nan, my Nan," he cried thickly. "It's you, honey, it's you!"

Doctor Call turned to the governor.

"I'm going to pardon him," said the executive, "if it costs me my reelection."

But it didn't cost him that. For the Fiddling Governor was Tennessee's best-loved man.

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WORLD WANDERERS

By **CHARLES C. JONES**

THE Gipsy comes with his caravan
To the place where roads divide,
(He hath no love for the country man,
But his Gipsy kin range wide)
He ties a knot in the roadside grass,
In the green-glad grass or brown,
That his kind may come in turn and pass
On the straight-flung road to town.

The Gipsy bends in the roadside heat,
Or the roadside cold, to tie
The telltale knot that the Gipsy feet
Of his kin pass truly by.
Over the roads of the world and back
He is faring day by day;
But always held to the beaten track,
For the grass-knot points the way.

The white man touched with the Gipsy strain,
With the strange, black blood and free,
(It may be new in the white man's vein,
Or it may be old as he)
The white man tried at the white man's fire,
Though he holds one spot as home,
No way is strange to his hot desire
And the world is his to roam.

Where the hills to untilled plains run down—
Oh, the lonely hills and bare!—
Where there is no hint of mart or town,
'T is the white man's foot first there;
In the wild, unconquered, new-found land,
Where the new-crossed rivers sing,
He comes ahead of the Gipsy band
That is only following.

The Gipsy holds to the grass-knot guide,
And it ties him at his ease;
But the white man walks on ways untried,
And he is not tied by these;
His only tie is the wind that blows,
Or the sun that shines by day,
And he bears a heart no Gipsy knows
To the wide world's ends away!

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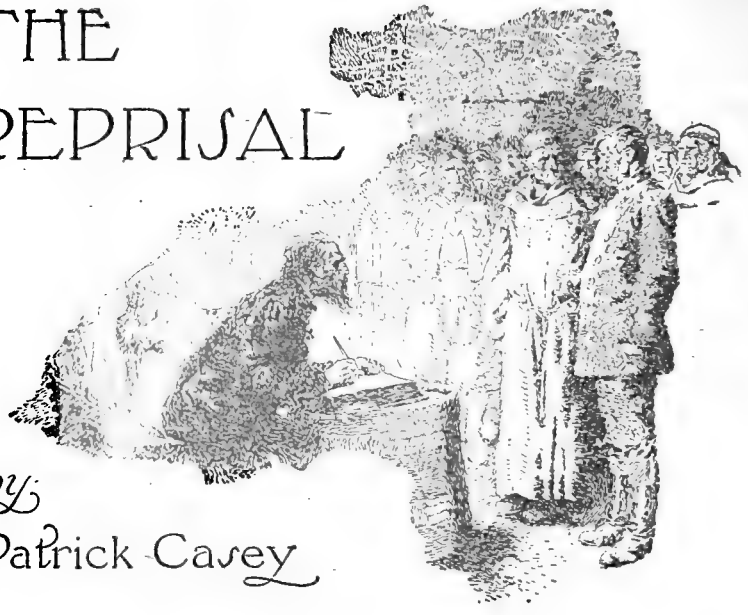
THE REPRISAL



by Patrick Casey

THE train jarred to such an abrupt stop that I started wide-eyed awake. The door of my third-class compartment was flung open; I heard the rumbling echoes of faraway cannon; and I saw, framed in the doorway, the orderly of Captain Graf von Mehden-Goshling, my commander.

"*Geht's los*—do we begin?" I asked, heeding those rumbling echoes. "Do we begin fighting?"

The orderly touched with his right hand his *Pickelhaube* in salute. He shook his head.

"The Captain's compliments," he said, "and he wishes to inform the *Herr Leutnant* that the stop is likely to be a long one."

"But what's the trouble? Where are we?"

"At Erquelinnes on the Sambre River, six kilometers from the French border, *Herr Leutnant*. The railway bridge over the Sambre has been wrecked."

"Wrecked! Why, the Thirtieth Brigade went through here only an hour before us. There must be some of the French lurking hereabouts."

"The Captain says it looks like the rough work of Belgian civilians, *Herr Leutnant*. Since the battle of Charleroi, the French have fled across the border. The Captain has detached the engine and sent it back to Namur in charge of Ensign Henckel to get some of the Eisenbahn Regiment."

I got out to stretch my legs after the long cramping ride. I knew it would take some time ere the Eisenbahn Regiment—that corps of expert railroad mechanics and constructors—could arrive from Namur, and a longer time ere they could repair that wrecked bridge.

But I had no sooner got out than I became aware of a rancid reek in the rain-moist, cannon-echoing August air. That reek was the sour smell from the masonry-clotted, stagnant water of the Sambre just ahead, and the acrid odor from the burnt ruins of the little hamlet to one side.

There had been fighting in this little hamlet of Erquelinnes. I was making on, for a short walk, among the ruins of it when I heard, of a sudden, from my men in the box-cars behind me, an outburst of shouts and laughter. Turning round, I saw my men shoving bits of Erbswurst and figs and cheese they had been eating, out between the slats of the box-cars to a black-robed tall, gaunt priest.

The priest, though he looked gaunt and emaciated enough to be starving, was not eating those cast-off bits of cheese and figs and pea-meal sausages. He was collecting them in his broad-brimmed, bowl-crowned black hat.

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I thought from that and from the fact that the railway bridge appeared to have been blown up by civilians that there must be some Belgians still living among the débris of ruins. But as I walked through the narrow, crooked, silent streets of the former town, cluttered with charred timbers and fallen bricks, and looked into the shells of roofless houses at the half-burnt household goods buried under shattered walls and caved-in floorings, I saw no signs of human inhabitants.

"It is just as well," I said to myself, "for that stagnant festering odor in the air spells malarial and typhoid fevers—if not worse!"

That was the view-point, I'll admit, not so much of the ruthless soldier as of the fear-filled doctor. In fact, I had looked upon the different dreadful aspects of the hamlet — upon the bullet - pitted gables pointing, like the jagged tusks of teeth, up into the sickish air, upon the shell-shattered walls, and upon the partly blackened, half-burnt carcasses of cows and horses and other animals, perhaps human, dusted with lime-plaster and rotting beneath those walls—I had looked upon all this not as Lieutenant Helmar Düsselheimer of the Thirty-first Brigade of Infantry of the Seventh German Army Corps, but as Dr. Helmar Düsselheimer, the obstetrician and disciple of Dr. Bernhardt Krönig, the great Freiburg specialist in *Dämmerschlaf*, or the scopolamin method of painless childbirth.

But I was a soldier, an officer. I should therefore have looked upon these shocking sights only through the eyes of a soldier.

We have army surgeons a-plenty who are specialists in combating or preventing malaria and typhoid, smallpox, cholera and other plagues and pestilences which attack an army on the march; men older than I, who have spent a lifetime in the study, and hence are too old to serve as soldiers. And I was a soldier and an officer, above all, because my specialty had not been for the army of men, but to save pain to the great army of women in that fight which is braver, though far less clamorous than war.

SO I TURNED, now, to retrace my steps to the stalled train when just ahead, coming toward me, I saw that tall, gaunt priest. The midday sun was shining on his moist bald head—for his broad-brimmed hat, heaped up with the cast-off food, was in his hands—and he was picking his way and lifting his black robe over the cluttered débris of the narrow silent street.

"Good day, *monsieur le curé*," I said in French as he made to pass me.

He lifted his stooped shoulders and I got a glimpse of a pair of deep-sunken black eyes smoldering in a face, pinched and grim, and brown and wrinkled as a mummy's. But he did not answer my greeting. He went on, his shoulders drooping once again over his inverted hat, his gaunt body bent almost double.

There was that in the smoldering glance of the priest—a species of black hate, perhaps—which aroused my suspicions.

"There must be people in this town," I said. "Belgian men and, maybe, women and children. He is taking that food to them."

I followed him. But I did not follow him as the soldier, determined to ferret out the hiding-place of these people and punish them as the miscreants who had wrecked the railway bridge. I followed him as the doctor, determined to learn the condition of these poor people. If there was hardship or disease among them—and both, to judge from that heaped-up hat, that malarial air, were likely—I would do what I could to alleviate the hardship and to prevent the disease from becoming a contagion which might spread to our men in passing through the hamlet.

So I followed the priest warily through the narrow ghostly streets between the tall bleak jagged spires of gable walls, across a thin line of stagnant canal, and into the center of the former town where the street widened out to form a rude horseshoe shape like a cobbled common.

Here the stench was nauseating, terrific, and looking for its source, I saw in the center of the cobbled common the carcass of one of those wolfish dray dogs of the Belgians, swelling from the recent rain and festering with flies.

Shattered gables fronted, at various angles, all about the cobbled space. On one side was a stout arched oak door, intact in a high stone wall. Behind that wall, the pillars of a wrecked church stood lone and naked, pointing like vindictive fingers up to heaven.

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The priest entered that arched doorway, and, as he did, he glanced back over one stooped shoulder and saw me. I came up to the oak door. It was pitted, like a pock-fretted skin, with bullets, some of which had bored clean through and through. I put an eye to one of these borings and peeped within.

Straight ahead was a stone-flagged court with a kind of tiny garden in its center. That garden was filled with geraniums, wanly red as dried blood, drooping and withered as by a blasting heat.

The garden also contained a plum-tree and two pear-trees, stripped of all fruit, their branches and leaves lopped off as by the heavy shells of guns. To one side stood in a row the slim, chipped stone pillars of what once had been the nave of a church. The place was solemnly still, shrouded with ruin and decay. There was no sign of the tall black-robed priest.

I knocked, and repeated the knock. There was no answer. I put my hand upon the heavy iron latch and swung the door inward. Then, from behind that door, appeared a shiny bald head and a pair of deep-sunken eyes, smoldering with black hate.

Intuitively I reached for my automatic. But as I did, the priest leaped out from behind the door. He grabbed my arms by the biceps. I had thought him starved and weak. But his grip was crushing, viselike. My biceps rolled like so much fat, my arms from wrists to pits felt limp, powerless.

"But *monsieur!*" I cried. "But *monsieur le curé!*"

"You followed me! You followed me!" he repeated over and over again.

He was like a madman. He swung me about bodily. Full into that tiny garden he swept me backward across the court.

The oak door banged closed. Behind the swing of that door against the stone wall I saw, over the priest's shoulder straining against my chest, a deep hole in the stone flagging like the ragged rent made by a fallen, exploded shrapnel shell. Beside it was an overturned flagstone.

That flagstone had been purposely removed from the hole in the pavement. Well now, as I struggled with my back against a tree, I saw in that deep hole the tonsured heads of two black-robed monks. They came up out of the hole, as the priest and I struggled in grim silence, and after them, as if the hole were a bottomless abyss, appeared a number of Belgians, their broad Flemish faces drawn with privation and unshaved of stubble-bearded hollow cheek.

It was an unequal struggle, now; they all seemed to get a handhold on me; and I went down, my head banging upon the edge of the stone flagging like a burst balloon.

SOMEBODY was bathing my head with cold water when I came to. My eyes opened upon the black-robed figure of one of the tonsured monks, and upon several candles blazing like wicked eyes out of a darkness as black as the monk's robe.

The air in that darkness was damp and earthy, like that of a cave, and was heavy with the odor of aging wine and the mustiness of rennet and ripening cheese; so I realized that I was in some store-cellarage deep down beneath the ruined monastery.

I no sooner opened my eyes, however, than the monk left off his bathing of my head to help me to my feet. The second monk appeared out of the pitchy, candle-flecked darkness and with one on either side I was led forward.

But as I stumbled on between the silent monks, I managed to feel for my automatic and sword. Both were gone. Gone, also, from my belt was my flat leather kit, containing pads, pencils, seals, envelopes, official blanks, a rolled map of France, and a few of my surgical instruments which I surreptitiously had hidden therein.

We seemed in the Stygian darkness to be walking through a passage lined with tiers of large wine-butts. Suddenly we turned a bend. Ahead, I saw a hollowed-out cavern, its tamped earthen floor littered with the skins of eaten cheeses, and its whole vaulted interior bright with the flickering light from a great number of candles. Those candles stood in tall branched brass candelabra like the candelabra of an altar. And behind them I saw the statues of St. Dominic, St. Joseph, the Virgin and the Christ-Child. They were all that had been saved from the razed church above.

Standing before these relics were men, a dozen men, in odds and ends of tattered clothing. They were Walloons and Flemings, with faces broad of bone but now, through fasting and suffering, so attenuated

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and sunken of flesh as to show dark shadows in the flickering light.

Seated before these men and behind an empty, upended cheese-vat, his black eyes smoldering in his dry-skinned emaciated face, was the tall gaunt priest.

It was a scene weird as a tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition. I knew fear.

The black-robed friars brought me up before that cheese-vat, then stepped back to either side of me. The black eyes of the priest, smoldering in their pits, burned into mine. Then the thin-lipped mouth in that mummified face opened, and a word crackled out like the snap of a whip-lash—

"Name?"

"Helmar Düsselheimer."

He wrote it down with a pen in a large book that looked like a baptismal register. I wondered, momentarily, at the reason for the record; then—

"Regiment?"

"Thirty-first Brigade of the Seventh German Army Corps."

"Rank?"

"Lieutenant."

The ascetic's eyes glowed like the sparkle of a gas-lamp on a black rain-swept street.

"Ah," he said, "so monsieur is a lieutenant, is he? And he would spy out where we poor Belgians are hiding and starving, and then loose his soldiers on us—like they did once before!"

"*Nein, nein, mein Herr!*" I expostulated, speaking in my indignation in my native tongue. Then recovering myself and talking earnestly in French: "I only followed you to see how you and your people managed to keep body and soul together in all this devastation and foulness. I only pity and want to help, I promise you!"

The priest leaped afoot. He leaned toward me far over the vat.

"Pity! Help! Promise! Oh, we know you, you brutes of Germans! We know you and your fine promises. Did you not promise to spare our little village and all its folk, if we housed you and did not snipe at you from the roofs? And where is Gustave Vanderfleet, the burgomaster, and Le Tic with his rag doll, and the Widow Wanze and all the rest? Dead, dead! And our poor little Erquelinnes laid waste by the followers of Nietzsche, the Antichrist!"

There was a muttering from the Belgians behind the priest—a muttering loud, but inarticulate as a growl.

"But—but, *meine Herren!*" I appealed to them. "Messieurs! There must have been some mistake! Some one must have broken the promise—some one must have shot—or else there would have been no reprisal."

At that word, so trite on the German tongue nowadays, the growl of the men grew louder, articulate, frightening.

"Reprisal—*quil* And this—you—are our reprisal!"

I was filled with a sudden dread. Were they about to inflict death upon me in retaliation for the destruction and suffering wrought by some of my own countrymen? With that dread in my eyes, I saw the priest—an attenuated black-robed figure—motion with his hand for silence. It was given him, a ghostly, breathing silence, broken only by the sputtering of an occasional candle.

"You hear, *monsieur le lieutenant.* Well, that's what we mean to do! You are our prisoner because you spied upon us. And because of the gross inhumanity practised upon us by your countrymen before you—the destruction and sudden deaths and horrors of the last week—upon you shall be visited our reprisal, the righteous revenge of the Belgians!"

He raised his thin-wristed hands in an expressive gesture.

"But *mercil*" he said. "We Belgians are ever fair, perhaps too fair. Let me tell you the facts."

He sat down then, heavily for so gaunt a man. He rested one black-sleeved elbow on the register upon the vat and shaded his sunken eyes with the talon-like fingers of his right hand.

The stillness of the cheese-cellar was accentuated by that uncanny one-two breathing, that occasional sputtering of the white candles. In a slow faraway timbre of voice, the priest spoke:

"I see a picture—a picture of a tiny village, unpretentious as the Nazarene Himself, and sleepy with contentment. A small stream winds by, as well-mannered and as quiet as the three hundred souls who dwell in that village. And the streets of that village are all of smooth clean cobbles; and on either hand of the streets are stone houses, white in the sunlight, with pretty shops beneath and homes above

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filled with round-cheeked, tousle-haired children. There is, in that village, a monastery of St. Dominic and a church to the living God, built by the hands of long-dead fathers and worshiped in by their bowed and bareheaded sons.

"A tiny sleepy spotless village, monsieur, where the door-stoops are washed in the morning by good housewives, where the crops of grain and cabbages, hops and sugar-beet are harvested by the big hands of poor but happy men, and where the very dogs do their tithe in the burden of living just lives. A thrifty village filled with hard-laboring, saving Belgians whose innate kindliness shines in their big faces; and a pious village, with sacred pictures in every home, where the priest tends his flock as a shepherd tends his sheep, walking calm of face and serene of soul because all is as it should be in the white light of God. That is Erquelinnes as it was!"

The lean long fingers of the priest fell from before his eyes. His voice shook with passion.

"You have walked between the tottering walls, through the clotted streets! And as you walked, your nostrils sickened at the fetid poisonous air, and your movement—the movement of the living—raised swarms of droning flies from the bodies of the dead, the raw smelling carcasses of cows and dogs and men! You have seen all, all! And this is Erquelinnes as your countrymen left it—a strangely still, shattered tomb of the awful dead!"

He stopped with that, but his passion-shaking voice came drifting back from the sable passages in ringing echoes. I waited for further explanation. But there was only silence, now without echoes, without breathing, with only eyes and eyes gleaming malignantly out of the somberness into mine.

"But why—why was this done? *Monsieur le curé*, you have not told me all! Was there no reason at all—no broken promise, no sniping, no nothing but wanton destructiveness? Oh, I can not, will not, believe this of Germans!"

"LISTEN!" said the priest. "There was in this village a poor creature to whom the light of God was never vouchsafed. He was a man in years and stature, yet he always carried about with him a poor rag doll. And because that feeble-witted creature was often convulsed with fits and spasms, we called him 'Le Tic.'

"His father was Gustave Vanderfleet, the linen manufacturer and for twenty years our honored burgomaster. And his father it was who sent out Pepins, the village bellman, to shake his clapper and Gossoncourt, the village crier, to announce to the gathered people that the Germans were coming.

" 'They are only men, these Germans, poor men like us,' ran the burgomaster's proclamation. 'Their invasion of our beloved country is only in obedience to orders. So do not hiss or shoot at them. Leave your doors unlatched, and quarter as many of the Germans in your homes as you can. Be hospitable and, above all, respectful, and there will ensue no harm to you or our little village.'

"The Germans came, their horses' hoofs ringing, their cannon chariots clattering over the cobbles, and their knee-high boots beating and beating in time to a vast booming matching song. The good folk obediently left their doors unlatched, but they shuttered their casements and from behind in the dark they watched, for they were much afraid.

"But Le Tic, teaching his rag doll to peep through the shutters above his father's linen shop, was not afraid. He was filled with a childish, but terrible perplexity. He dropped the rag doll and from above the little mantel in his father's parlor, he took down an old-fashioned gun, wide at the muzzle like a horn.

"Now there was no hate in his heart for the conquering Germans. He was only Le Tic, monsieur, and he did not understand. But he saw those soldiers tramping, tramping, tramping—singing all the while—and not one out of line, out of step. Perhaps he wanted to stop that tramping, that clinking of pannikins, that vast singing; perhaps it was only to see one of those soldiers fall out of line, out of step. Anyhow, he lifted the blunderbuss, and pointed it through the shutters, and fired. He killed a man—a spick-and-span boyish ensign with tan boots and tan gloves!

"Instantly there was a dreadful stillness. The columns stopped, the horses stopped, the wheels of the cannon sunk into ruts between the cobbles and the singing boomed away like the cry of a wounded bittern. An officer, a chesty, whiskered man, shout-

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ed an order. A number of the soldiers invaded the house. And for a moment all that could be heard was the threshing feet of those searching soldiers.

"Then from the linen shop, the poor old widowed burgomaster, Monsieur Gustave Vanderfleet, was dragged out, his silk hat of office gone, his white hair mussed like a horse's mane, and his spidery shanks of legs shaking as with palsy. From the home above came the burgomaster's housekeeper, the Widow Wanze, her weeping making no louder sound than the soft tread of her carpet slippers. And then after her, clutching his poor rag doll in fright, the wild-eyed drooling half-wit, Le Tic.

"The chesty officer stood in the center of the silent street. He roared a command. A squad of twelve armed soldiers and one lieutenant stepped forth. They marched Monsieur Vanderfleet off toward the elms near the canal. There was a volley of shots in the dreadful stillness. Then the squad returned—without the burgomaster.

"The Widow Wanze was next. And the half-wit watched her go, his mouth loose like a child's, for now he knew what he had done.

"The returned squad laid hands upon him. He shrieked frightfully. In a sudden shocking spasm, he doubled up and tore at the rags of his doll. The good folk appeared at their casements, the Black Friars at their oak door, to remonstrate with the soldiers. But the soldiers shoved poor Le Tic toward the elms—and death.

"The good folk muttered. That muttering sped from casement to casement, from house to house, like the sinister sound of a brewing storm. I went among them, monsieur. I counseled them to be submissive, peaceful. Gossoncourt laughed bitterly at my words. He had worked for many years for the burgomaster both as a linen weaver and as the village crier. And few of the rest would heed me, few even of the inoffensive Dominicans.

"I was afraid of the night. I gathered the few heedful folk together. We stripped our altar of its sacred statues, its candelabra, its communion cloths, and carried them down here. Down here, unknown to the soldiers, we carried a few of the household valuables of some of my people. And all through the night, my people huddled, fear-filled and chilled, down here in the damp of these cellars.

"Myself, *monsieur le lieutenant*, I watched above, behind the oak door. I watched the tiled top of the house of Gossoncourt. It was a feebly moonlight night with a piece of moon in the sky like the horn of a cow. Suddenly, against that cow's horn, I saw on the housetop the figure of Gossoncourt. He raised a gun and full into the squad of the watch, lying about a camp-fire in the street below, he fired. As at a signal, from many housetops, other burghers rose up and fired.

"Ah, but that was a horrible hour, monsieur! The Germans swept the housetops, the casements, the very cobbled streets with bullets. Some went wild and struck against the door in front of me like the spray of hail. I saw soldiers running hither and thither with straw in their arms. And then—*ma foi!* The houses lighted up, the whole sky lighted up with a lurid glare, and that cow's horn of moon went red as a Saracen's sword!

"Came, then, the detonating boom of howitzers, the thud of dropping shells and the swish and screech through the air of exploded shrapnel. It was everywhere, that long-drawn sound of crumbling walls! It was right near me—a terrific thunder, a quivering of ground, and I saw the walls of my church totter inward! Bits of stone and sharp pieces of plaster flew all about me. I leaped through the hole in the flagging and so down here to the security of these cellars.

"In the wan gray film of dawn, of the three hundred souls who had lived in that village, only were left the two Dominican brothers and the few good heedful folk who had hidden down here. And in the village itself not a stone was left as it had been. All was death and ghastly ruin—all, all because of the foolish act of an unwitting madman!"

The priest was afoot, his lean long index finger extended like a ferule, his eyes smoldering in their pits, and his passion-pulsing voice striking into my ears like points of chill steel.

"Do you ask now why we hate all Germans? Do you ask what we will do to you? We are not fanatics; we are not even brutes of blood and fiends of carnage like you, like all soldiers. But oh, *mon Dieu!* We have seen our dead, and we have taken unto ourselves the law of your own Nietzsche—'Be hard!' With you we

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will be hard! The day is now at the noon. In an hour, at one o'clock, you shall be shot to death!"

Now, as the priest said that and I fell back before the forward surge of the men and the priest's passion-filled voice rang in echoes through the cellars, of a sudden from the blackness behind me came, like an echo of the echoes, a horrid scream—a woman's scream—a scream as of unendurable agony. It died into a dull moan, and then choked off into a silence, deep and chill, that froze every man where he stood.

The priest crossed himself, then spoke on as if nothing had been heard:

"We have written down your name, rank and regiment. For a while your countrymen will list you as missing. But after this dreadful war is over, we shall notify your war office of the manner in which you met your death. We shall say you spied upon us and, as a spy, were shot to death. Now is there any one else whom you would like notified?"

I nodded my head. I was too shocked by my doom, by that horrid scream to speak. The priest leaned over his register, the pen poised between his claws of fingers.

"Name and address of the person?"

I managed to say:—

"Dr. Bernhardt Krönig, of the University of Baden, at——"

That last word, just suspended upon my lips, I sucked back into my throat. Beads of sweat sprung out upon my forehead like globules of ice. For echoing once again through the cellar was that woman's scream, horrid and chill.

"*Monsieur! Monsieur le curé!*" I gasped "What—what is that?"

"Ah," said the priest, crossing himself once more, "I see *monsieur le lieutenant* begins to know the fear of death. But of that screaming have no fear. It is only the poor girl-wife of Henri Harlebeke, who lies in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Would to God, we had only a physician like Dr. Krönig——"

"A physician!" I echoed, carried away by the thought that here was a dire need for my skilled services. "Monsieur, let me do something of good before I die! Let me help you, *monsieur le curé*. Oh, believe me, I only pity you and want to help you! I am not a ruthless follower of Nietzsche. I am a Christian, monsieur—a Christian and a doctor."

"A doctor?"

"An obstetrician, *monsieur le curé*—a disciple of Dr. Krönig."

The priest looked hard at me. Then to the two black-robed friars:

"Bring him this way, my brothers."

HE TOOK up from a candelabrum a lighted candle. Following him, the two Dominicans on either hand and the dozen Belgians pressing behind, we left that cellar of the statues and made through an aisle in the earth like the one by which I had entered.

Quickly we came to a small cellar cluttered with women. Each woman had a babe in her arms and one or two clinging to her skirts. All stood silently aside for us, and the priest, the two brothers and I made toward the farther wall where, behind a screen of wine-butts, the woman was groaning in a low dull monotone of pain.

The woman lay upon a scanty huddle of bedding and blankets on the damp ground. She was a fair blonde young creature, little more than a girl, her yellow hair curling softly about her pale brow and falling across one tense white arm. She looked up at me with brave, blue eyes.

Beside her, her old wrinkled mother rocked from side to side on her cane, and crooned over and over to herself some harsh-sounding Walloon words.

"What does the old woman say?" I asked.

"She is talking of her sons in the Belgian army, *monsieur le lieutenant*," answered the priest. " 'Five sons,' she says—'two who walk, two who sit with folded arms upon the clattering cannon chariots, and one who carries a sword. And this one must be a boy,' she says, 'a grandson to fight for the king!' "

I said: "*Monsieur le curé*, may I have my leather kit?"

An hour later, the old wrinkled grandmother placed the new-born infant in its mother's arms. Rapidly then, the grandmother began talking to herself in Walloon. When the priest finally appeared, I questioned him with my eyes.

" 'We shall call him Albert,' she is saying," the priest answered me. " 'Albert—after our king!' "

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To such patriotism I could only bow my head in sincere admiration.

"A brave man," I said, "and nowadays, among us Germans, an honored noble name."

The priest's black eyes lighted up in their pits, his thin lips twisted into a smile. Impulsively he stepped forward and took my hand.

"Thank you, *monsieur le lieutenant*," he said huskily. "For those words and what you have done, I do thank you!"

But I jerked my hand away. The operation had quieted my nerves a bit by focusing my thoughts entirely on the delicate work at hand; but now that that work was done and my services no longer required, my brains were stirred once more by thoughts of my fate and I was leaping in every nerve under the tension of waiting. I was beside myself to end the ordeal.

"Please, please do not keep me waiting, monsieur!" I said with parched lips. "The hour is long past. I want to die while I still can be brave—while I still can remember the brave eyes of this mother, who has borne a child in all this squalor and hardship and terror!"

The priest bowed low.

"Come with me," he breathed.

SO WE left that cellar of women, the Belgian men following and whispering to one another, the tall gaunt priest walking beside me, his shoulders stooped, his bald head bent as though he were listening to those whispers.

We came once more into that cellar, littered with the skins of cheeses, lighted by the many bracketed candles, and solemn with the upright, incongruous stark statues. The priest went behind the cheese-vat, and I before. The priest spoke suddenly.

"My men are whispering that we should not kill you, *monsieur le lieutenant.* They say that you have saved two lives—the life of the young mother and the life of her child—and that, therefore, you should be allowed to live your own life!

"But while I left you, during the hour, my lookouts told me that there were squads of soldiers searching for you among the ruins. Your train is still stalled in the village, monsieur, while the bridge is being repaired. So my men fear what you will do if you are released now, and allowed to rejoin your regiment. They are afraid of another reprisal!

"Therefore, they think it best to keep you here; then tonight lead you, blindfolded and unarmed, across the French border, six kilometers away, and leave you there to shift——"

"But—but that is a hostile country—the country of the enemy!"

The priest's black eyes were smiling eyes, now.

"I know, *monsieur le lieutenant*; but you have not heard me say that *I* agree with my men. Ah, no! I know a Christian when I see one, even if he is in the uniform of our enemy. Therefore, monsieur, there will be no captivity, no blindfold. You will walk out of here, now—at this very moment—a free man, and armed!"

He reached down behind the vat and passed over to me my belt, automatic and sword. I already had my leather kit. Then he led me round the bend of that wine-butt-lined passage by which I had entered, and so, by a gradual ascent, up through that hole in the stone flagging into the ruined court and the sunlight of afternoon. Once again, I heard those rumbling echoes of faraway cannon and smelled in the air that sickening rancid reek.

As he swung open the stout oak door, the priest's black eyes gleamed steadily into mine. I met his gaze, and reached out my hand. As if we were sealing some solemn compact, for the second time we shook hands.

"The reprisal now lies with you, *monsieur le lieutenant*," said the priest. "But I place my trust and the welfare of my poor people in your goodness of——"

He broke off. As if frightened, he ejaculated—

"*Mon Dieu!*"

Coming across the cobbled common on a run, their fixed steel bayonets and the metal spikes of their *Pickelhauben* glinting in the sun, were a squad of my soldiers under command of young Ensign Henckel! The priest darted behind the oak door; the ensign and his men panted up, just as that door slammed shut. But behind that door, I knew, the priest was crouched and listening fearfully.

Without saluting, Ensign Henckel blurted out:

"*Herr Leutnant!* You have been detained! You have been missing over an hour! And these dogs of Belgians who wrecked the bridge—they captured you!

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I saw one dart behind the door! It was that black priest!"

He made to pass me, the steel bayonets of his men held eagerly at the charge toward that oak door.

I stepped before him.

"*Nein, nein!*" I shouted, and I waved him back.

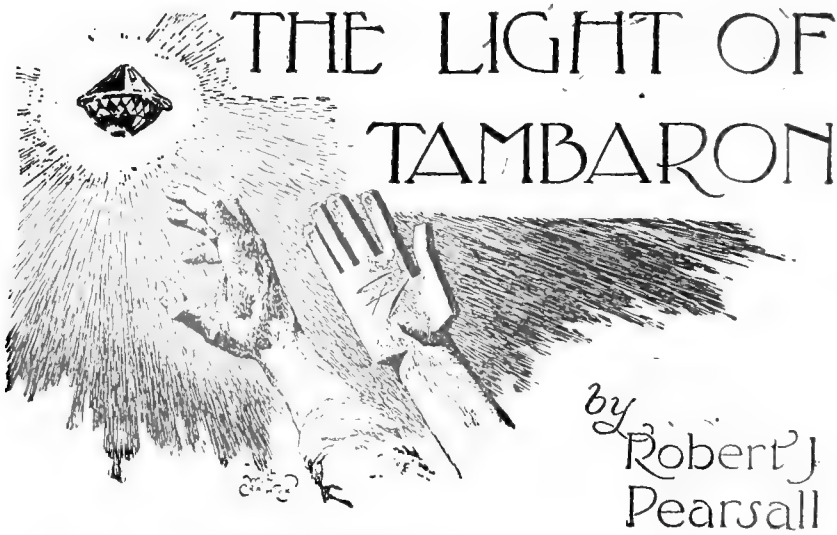
Then I picked up from the pavement a bit of plaster that had fallen from the shattered wall of the church.

"Look, *meine Herren!*" I said to them all.

Then slowly, in stiff German script, I wrote upon the bullet-pocked surface of that oak door. It was according to our military regulations—a command no German would ever question, or dare to disobey.

"*Gute Leute—schonen!*" were the words of my reprisal. Which meant "Good people —spare!"

THE LIGHT OF TAMBARON



by Robert J Pearsall

Author of "Discipline," "Color Guards," etc.

Still the hidden, rushing, bubbling
Fires beneath earth's surface roar;
Still the wind, the water troubling,
Wreaks its wrath against the shore.
Still beyond the world's gray mart
Leaps aflame the untamed heart.

R. J. P.

OUT of the pain-fringed mantle of oblivion that had enveloped him, Deeth struggled in a bodily quietude born of fear. Instinctively, like a hunted and hiding animal, he shammed continued unconsciousness, listening intently.

There came an ominous rustling of wind-stirred thatch, the tap-tapping of palm branches, the rasp of a cicada. Deeth lowered an investigating finger to the hard surface on which he lay. It was a bamboo mat. Still without stirring, he opened his eyes.

He was lying on the floor of a one-room nipa hut. Within his range of vision was neither furniture nor living thing. The thatched window-shutters were flung high, and the door was wide open. Through the door Deeth could look down a short straight trail, across which were flung the shadows of trees and lazily swinging creepers. Beyond at a little distance glowed the waters of a sleeping sea.

The sight of that sea stimulated Deeth's memory and sent his hand swiftly to his head. He discovered it was tightly bandaged with some sort of long, tough leaves, wound round once with cloth. But to his movement had come an answering stir, just back of him. Instantly Deeth was sitting up and had half turned, a panther-like flash of action.

But it was only an old bent brown woman,

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with sunken, bead-like eyes and shriveling flesh. She was extending a small gourd toward him with a hand that shook.

"*Icao may tubig, maputi lalaqui?*" she asked.

Would he have water? For four days Deeth had not tasted it. His lips were cracked, his mouth was burning, his throat was a dry channel of longing. He drained the gourd in two gulps, and thrust it back into the woman's hands.

"More!" he demanded. "More!"

But the woman shook her head with feeble finality, and squatted again on the bamboo floor.

This denial filled Deeth with a sort of fury. But the sudden movement had set his injured head whirling dizzily, and he sank back upon the mat. After a moment his reason justified the woman. Much water was not good for a man that had thirsted as long as he. But food, now! Presently he asked for it.

The crone had anticipated this request. She brought him an earthen bowl filled with a thin gruel made of rice. When he had finished this he felt steadier. He got up, went to the window opposite the door, and looked out.

THE shack in which Deeth had found himself stood on the seaward edge of a little *barrio*, which huddled in haphazard fashion on top of a *cogon*-covered hill. It was an unfamiliar-looking village, peculiarly so.

Not that there was anything strange to Deeth in the sight of the naked brown children a-sprawl in the sun, nor in their infantile voices babbling Cuyonos, nor in the wrinkled faces of the old men and old women smoking hemp-tied cheroots at the top of the bamboo house-ladders, or busied with cooking underneath the shacks. But the houses themselves were built on unfamiliar lines, uniquely gabled, uniquely thatched. And certainly the stout-walled building that rose something like a Chinese dagoba in the center of the *barrio*, overtopping everything, was of a sort Deeth had never before seen in the Islands.

This realization seemed to be a relief to Deeth. Lines of anxiety smoothed themselves out of his forehead. He turned to the old woman.

"Where are the rest of your people, mother?" he asked.

"They fish, they work in the rice, they wash themselves," she droned slowly.

Deeth grunted, a little skeptical of this unusual manifestation of industry, and looked out of the window again.

He was just in time to see the door of that curiously shaped central building open. For a moment a puzzling flicker of lights within it piqued his interest. Then they were eclipsed by the figure of a girl who came slowly through the door and closed it behind her.

She was not fifty yards away, and Deeth knew her instantly for a *mestizo*. Her features were delicate, her skin light brown and warmly tinted. Even in her ill-fitting *camisa* and skirt she moved with a lithe grace that no full-blooded native woman could emulate. She put out her hand to touch a yellow calibon blossom, and the sheer beauty of her rounded arm brought a light to Deeth's eyes, parted his lips in a short, quick breath of admiration, and made him glance ruefully downward at his soiled and disheveled white linens.

He watched her until she passed out of sight behind a clump of shrubbery. After a moment he remarked, carefully indifferent:

"They're not all gone, the people-of-working-years. Who's the half-white girl that's left behind?"

"She!" The old woman's voice was filled with sudden distrust and hostility. "She's the Girl of the Mist, *laputi lalaqui* (white man). She's the Keeper of the Light!" She gave the titles with a sort of defiance, as if there were a protecting charm in them.

But Deeth grinned.

"The Girl of the Mist—some poetic name for a *mestizo!*" he thought. "The Keeper of the Light!" Suddenly his reckless, not unhandsome face was eagerly alive. "The Light! What's that? By all the drunken gods! I wonder if—but it's impossible."

An old story had leaped to Deeth's mind, a story which is still current in the Southern Islands, but which most people regard as the idlest of legends. So did Deeth regard it, but nevertheless he put his next question with hardly repressed excitement.

"Where am I, anyway, mother?"

"We know not what this island is called in the words of the white people, who to our joy trouble us not, but we call it 'Tambaron.' And ourselves are called by those who know us 'Kaybayanapuy.'"

"Neighbors of the Fire," translated

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Deeth. "That's Tagalog. People of the Fire, I suppose. Lord, it sounds right enough. I wonder if my luck has turned at last."

Under the spur of his curiosity, Deeth was feeling marvelously stronger. A sudden desire for activity possessed him. He wanted to go out and hunt up the girl, he wanted to explore the island, he wanted above all things to investigate the mysterious house of the lights. But long experience in the tropics had stamped upon his brain the profound lesson of biding his time. He begged the old woman for more food and water, and, getting it, settled down again on his mat.

He stayed there until, with the heat of the day, the bulk of the tribe came back from their work. Then, as he had anticipated, he was taken before the head man of the *barrio*. This individual, who Deeth later learned was also the local *balian*, or religious head, and whose name was Maurarato, squatted cross-legged on a pandanus mat, and demanded to know how a white man, who he had heard were all kings, had come to be found senseless, alone, and sick with the hunger-sickness, in a half-wrecked *vinta* driving upon the rocks of Tambaron.

Deeth's story and his expressions of profound respect were equally artistic. The ship of which he had been captain had been attacked by Samal pirates, and evil *bulbuls* (devils) had entered his crew so they would not fight. He had escaped by pretending to be dead, and had been thrown into the sea.

Swimming under water, he had reached one of the pirates' boats, and had hidden himself in the bottom of it. At night he had cut that boat away from his ship, and made sail in it.

For many days he had sailed without food or water, and at last he had slept, and awakened to the shock of his *vinta* hurling itself upon a reef. He had but awakened and had slept again, for his head crashed against the gunwale, and he had known nothing more until he found himself in the hands of his good friends, the Kaybayanapuy.

The latter part of the tale was true, but it was from Bongao, on the island of Tawi-Tawi, that Deeth had really come, fleeing hard-pressed from the consequences of a bit of *vino*-inspired outlawry.

Well known in all the provinces south of Manila was Deeth, adventurer, beachcomber, renegade, a man with restless feet. So well known indeed that, now that the hand of Western law gripped for the first time at his shoulder, there had been for him only one possible path of flight, still further south, into the mysterious Celebes. And the adventure had appealed to him.

For five years he had pursued fortune fruitlessly; perhaps somewhere under the light of the Southern Cross it waited for him. For five years he had tossed dice with death, many times with the hazard no less than this. So he had shoved off in an empty *vinta*, there being no time to provision it, and chance or fate had at last broken his shell of a boat on the coral reef of an island that was little more than a speck on the tropic sea.

Maurarato dismissed him with neither an intimation of belief in his story nor of pleasure at his presence. But Deeth was satisfied. He returned to his shack, and the next morning, quite as a matter of course, joined the fishing party. And from that day on he lived with the natives as one of them.

It was nothing new for him. And if he were ever to satisfy his growing curiosity concerning the hidden Light, if he were to improve his quickly formed acquaintance with its fair keeper, if he were even to preserve his life while attempting these things, he soon learned he would need to cultivate the good favor of the natives very skilfully indeed.

So, besides his labor, he made them two rare gifts of knowledge. In the swampy thicket back of the *barrio* he found *tubur* roots. With these he taught the natives a simpler method of fishing. Thrown into pools, they stupefied fish, which came belly-up to the surface. Gathered in nets and suspended in water, the fish quickly recovered, and were as good as ever for eating. Also he taught them how to make *catipan* from certain resinous plants, so poisonous that game scratched by a weapon dipped in it died almost instantly.

Deeth had picked up these bits of information among the tribes to the north. He was much troubled at first that the Kaybayanapuy knew nothing of intoxicants, and he was minded to teach them how to make *babud* from rice, like the Ifugaos. But he forbore. A people can not learn

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the delights of drunkenness in a day. The natives might ignorantly judge the value of the brew by its after effects. After a week, when a new resiliency of body and spirit rewarded his own unaccustomed abstinence, he was glad he had refrained.

Deeth heard the men talk of trading trips to Tawi-Tawi, where they exchanged gutta-percha for cloth, and of taking oil and pandanus mats to Borneo. These places seemed to be about equally distant. From this fact he judged he was on one of the islands of the Sibutu group, which lies between the Celebes and the Sulu Sea.

He could hardly be further out of the white man's world. So little known and so unregarded by the powers that be are these islands that the map-changers, in framing the Treaty of Paris, overlooked them entirely. It was a long time after they were orphaned by Spain before they were adopted by America. But when Deeth mentioned either country to the natives, he was met with blank and incurious stares.

BUT in the girl Aeila, the keeper of the Light, Deeth aroused interest enough. Hers was the unenviable heritage of the *mestizo*, an unsatisfied mind in rebellion against its environment. Deeth strained the limits of their common vocabulary to paint for her pictures of a white man's world. He subtly identified himself with that world. And the white side of her had leaned toward him from the beginning.

Deeth was her first lover, the first man indeed that had ever aspired to her, for the natives worshiped her in a most puzzling spirit of awe. And it was not many days before she was greeting him with soft and shining eyes.

It may be that to Deeth, too, the miracle came as soon. But he would not admit it.

Deeth had scoffed at love a long time. Not having known it, he denied it; and this denial had grown into a mental habit. Love was but a word to him, synonymous with desire. But this he knew, that he desired her with a strength that at times nearly overrode his prudence, with a fondness, too, that astonished and exasperated him. That fondness was a new feeling. It seemed to him a weakness, and he tried to destroy it.

Deeth could not win from Aeila even a caress. Something held her back. A barrier stood between them that all his pleading and promises could not overcome. And slowly upon Deeth grew the conviction that this barrier was somehow the product of the influence of the still mystery-enshrouded light.

For he had not yet viewed it. Something of its history he learned by listening to the talk of the natives—enough to make him wait for an invitation. It had been given by Heaven to a *balian* many generations ago. The queerly shaped temple had been built for it, thick-walled and thick-ceilinged as no other house ever known; and since then it had been the *anting-anting* (charm) that had protected the tribe from harm. The "Light of Darkness" the natives called it, the "Star of the Earth," and spoke of its "million million rays," and its "white flame like the sun."

To the natives it was a talisman; to Aeila it was more. Sometimes she referred to it vaguely and reverently. Oftener she spoke of the "Spirit of the Light," and then she might have talked of God. Her clear dark eyes would fill with an ineffable light, and upon her face would come a look of exaltation.

Then Deeth would rage inwardly, for he felt separated from her by the width of a thousand suns. And her very purity and unattainability increased his longing.

One day they sat under a nipa palm on a great cliff overlooking the sea, and Deeth pressed his suit until he thought her reluctance nearly overcome. He would marry her according to the custom of her people, and forever afterward they two would be happy on Tambaron.

At first he had made this promise lightly. Later, with surprise, he had found himself considering it seriously. Life on Tambaron was not so unpleasant, and with Aeila—Really, it was Aeila's own trust and truth that was rebuking him, opening his careless eyes to the foulness of his insincerity.

At last Aeila rose swiftly.

"That I care for you you know, Deeceth—" she could never learn quite how to pronounce his name—"but there is a thing you do not know. Come!

"I am going to show you the Light," she said, as she led the way into the *barrio*.

IT WAS the time of the siesta, and the village was very quiet. On the way to the temple they encountered only one old woman, who looked

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angrily at Deeth. Indeed, Deeth's courtship of Aeila had met with the approval of none of the tribe, and it was only by narrow hazards and clever handling that he had avoided open hostility.

The heavy door of the temple was unfastened. But alongside it, nearly upright, Deeth noticed a stout wooden bar supported at its base by a leather hinge. It seemed to be held from falling downward into its socket by an invisible pin or string. Deeth gave it but a passing glance. Even were it in place across the door, there was no way to lock it. It could bar no one from entering the temple.

Aeila opened the door. Deeth stood at last in the chamber of the flickering lights. Perhaps it was because of the dead, heavy air, robbed of its oxygen by the perpetual flames, but as Deeth looked at them a strange chill crept over him like an evil premonition.

"So they burn forever and ever," half whispered Aeila. "Is there another such thing in all the world?"

The lights were at the further end of the chamber. They were twelve in number, six on either side of a very strange image. They burned with a bluish sort of flame, hovering weirdly about three feet from the floor. It was not until Deeth got quite close to them that he saw they came from slender metal rods, tapered at the end almost to a point.

Then, of course, the mystery became no mystery at all. Surface gas, discovered somehow by the ancient *balian*, had been converted into a perpetual altar fire.

Deeth turned his attention to the image itself. He did not understand it then; but he saw what was, and still is, one of the most striking representations of human aspiration ever conceived by a savage mind.

On a square wooden pedestal was poised a roughly hewed veiled human figure, life-size. Poor as was the workmanship, yet to Deeth for one creepy moment the image seemed alive. On the ball of one foot it supported itself, and it seemed to be leaping upward and outward into space, and yet it seemed chained, as it were, to its pedestal, to its rock of limitations. But to the furthest extent of its finger-tips it strained upward, and just beyond its reach glowed a star.

After he discovered it, it was for that star alone Deeth had eyes. For it was an earth-born star, fashioned in the shape of a great diamond and suspended from the ceiling of the temple by wires that were nearly invisible. As if filled with some living inner fire, it glowed and gleamed and glittered, flinging back the rays of the altar lights in a myriad scintillations. It was magnificent, a stone larger than the Kohinoor, and it would have excited the cupidity of a king.

To Deeth the adventurer, Deeth who for years had dreamed of just some such chance of quick and magnificent fortune, there came a rush of hot and acquisitive elation that well-nigh destroyed his self-control.

For a moment he clenched his fist, gasping. In a flashing vision he saw himself again in the Western world, freed forever from man's primal curse, all of earth's pleasures his, luxury and power and adulation, every sensuous enjoyment, desire's complete fulfilment. An equal of princes would he be, and freer than a king.

It is no wonder that his fingers itched to grasp the prize, hanging before him, his already it seemed, like fruit waiting for the plucking.

But Aeila was expecting him to speak. He had to say something, something that would not betray him.

"What does it mean?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ah, you feel it too!" she cried in a pleased way. "I think to everybody it means different things, and to you maybe the same as to me. I hope so. And to me it means *all*. For you see, I came from it. It sent me. That is why I brought you here—to tell you."

The strangeness of that statement caught Deeth's attention even against the attraction of the stone. And the low music of her voice, her softly glowing eyes, the new shyness that sat upon her like a garment, all the sweet strange beauty of her yielding reminded him that his find on the island of Tambaron had been a double one. Surely he could not leave her—Aeila the pure, Aeila the beautiful, who loved him!

"You came from it! Now how is that?" he asked.

"Nay, I know not. It is only what I have been told. One morning I was found—oh, so little!—just inside the door of this temple. The mist brought me. That is why I am called the Girl of the Mist. The Spirit of the Light sent me through the mist to be keeper of the Temple of the

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Light. So that has always been my work, to keep it clean and care for it. And I think the Light has cared for me too, and will always care for me. And I can never leave it, even to go to those far countries that you tell me of. So you see, Dee-eeth"—she touched him softly—"I felt that this must all be told to you before——"

A month before Deeth would have grinned at this naïve explanation of her origin, and at her gullibility in believing it. A month before the native delicacy of the brown people that had inspired the story would not have touched him at all. Nor could he, the white *ladrone* whose only god had been materialism, have realized then how Aeila's life had twined itself about the symbol before him.

But since Deeth had come to Tambaron a new influence had been at work upon him, softening him, sensitizing him, against his will. Now he understood, at least in part. Indeed, with Aeila's very babyhood filled with *balian*-taught worship of the Light, her childhood filled with care of it, her cramped womanhood finding in the carved figure straining toward the unattainable an exact interpretation of her own soul-hunger, it is plain how it had come to mean more to her than life itself.

But to Deeth, with the flaming jewel tantalizing him and all the delights of the world beckoning him around the corner, this feeling of hers was but an obstacle against which he must set his wits.

His arm went around her, he kissed her in loverly fashion, and all the time his mind raced down a crooked path of his own devising. He won her promise to marry him "before the Light," with no intention that she should ever see its fulfilment.

He who had scoffed at love felt that he understood it now to his finger-tips; he must have Aeila—but he must have the stone, too. And he must have both without delay. To wait through the long season of betrothal, to settle down then on that suddenly hateful island—against this all the impatient egotism of the man flamed in passionate rebellion.

After awhile Aeila drew away from him. Then Deeth turned the talk again to the Light.

"It is very beautiful," he said. "Did no one ever try to take it away?"

Aeila's eyes widened with wonder.

"Why should one do that?" she asked. "Is not beauty beauty wherever it may be? But I think it guards itself. The old men say so. The Spirit of the Light blows its breath upon the man that tries to take it, and he dies."

"Then no one watches at night?" Deeth persisted. "And the door is always unfastened?"

"It is true," smiled Aeila. "Why do you ask? Is it not so in the country you come from?"

Deeth did not reply. Goaded by his dual desires, his mind had suddenly conceived a promising plan of action. He began to whisper to Aeila very tenderly.

It was a simple enough thing he begged of her, a moonlight sail together to seal their betrothal. He pictured to her the beauties of the night, the trail of light across the water, the gleaming stars, the many-colored phosphorescence, the rush of the soft wind against their faces. She would meet him on the beach near the great rock just when the moon rose out of the sea. And Aeila finally agreed, trusting him.

Deeth gave her a Judas kiss, and together they left the temple.

THAT afternoon Deeth selected his *vinta*, and shortly after dark stocked it with provisions. Dried fish, rice and fruit were plentiful and easily gotten at; and he added to this three large wicker-covered jugs of water.

Well before the time fixed for his meeting with Aeila, he was ready for the great hazard. And it was characteristic of the man that he saw in the working out of his plan no hazard at all, but regarded his pillage of the temple, his carrying off of Aeila, his flight to Borneo and thence to a diamond market, already as good as accomplished.

In this belief he had some justification. He had already traveled as far in a similar craft without food or water. The Summer monsoon was a very dependable wind. And Deeth himself was a dependable man, as far as his own safety was concerned. For five years he had met and overcome the unexpected in a hundred savage guises. It would be odd if fate or the natives of Borneo could spring a new trick on him.

The night was cloudless, and the light of the Southern constellations bathed Tambaron like a caress. The older folks and the children drowsed on their sleeping mats, but here and there strolled a young

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couple, or sat side by side in a shadowy place, or whispered long good nights at paternal doors, moved by the world-wide and age-old witchery that is past understanding.

Deeth walked past those couples boldly until he got within a hundred yards of the temple. Then he dropped on his hands and knees, crept under three shacks that stood in a row, dragged himself along the ground across an empty space, and so reached the house of the Light. He rose in the shadow of it, stole around to the door, and entered.

Deeth had jeered inwardly when Aeila had told him that the god of the Light was able to guard its own. He jeered again as the door fell shut behind him; but it was a courage-reinforcing jeer born of a sudden illogical tremor.

For a moment his habitual self-confidence was dissolved in fear. The dead air seemed filled with a sinister menace now, and the twelve altar lights were strangely like watching eyes. Something of menace seemed, too, to have come into the attitude of the human-like image. Partly it reached out toward the star of its desire; partly threatened with an indefinable threat any who might attempt to forestall it.

But when Deeth's eyes caught the white gleam of that stone his fears were swept away in a rush of cupidity, and his muscles tensed into swift action.

He crossed the room in five noiseless strides, clambered upon the pedestal, balanced himself with one arm around the wooden figure, leaned out as it was leaning, and gripped the glittering jewel with his free hand. He got hold well above its rough setting, and pulled tentatively. Nothing gave way.

He hesitated a moment. He had provided himself with a thin hard stone which might be used as a file. But filing would take time, and his posture was an awkward one. Also it was a position in which he dared not exert his full strength, since to do so might topple over the image.

Taking a firmer grip on the stone, he slipped from the pedestal and swung out into space, his whole weight bearing downward. Just above his hand the wires snapped off. He dropped, stumbled and fell, the hand that held the jewel striking sharply on the hardwood floor.

He was up instantly, groping in the dark, with a confused impression that there was something wrong. It was some seconds before he realized that it was the darkness itself that was wrong. Inexplicably, the altar lights had been snuffed out. Deeth stood bewildered in a blackness that seemed somehow horrible.

But his heart was too full of exultation for the easy entrance of fear. In his hand the coveted stone rested like a devil's blessing.

As he felt his way to the door he marveled that he could carry a fortune around with him like an egg. The ease with which it had been procured filled him with a sort of amazement. Unhallowed visions of what he would do with it flooded his imagination.

Caught up in those transports, he found himself pushing on the door, which did not open.

He stopped, puzzled. *Was* this the door, or only an inequality in the wall? He satisfied himself as to this by feeling of the jamb. Then came a chilling memory of the precariously balanced bar he had observed that afternoon. Like a trapped animal, he flung himself against the door. It creaked a little, but held firmly.

His swift intuition of disaster changed into certainty. Deeth drew back with a sinking heart. Some one, observing his entrance into the temple, had slipped up behind him and dropped the bar. By now the *barrio* was being roused.

The unbalancing terror of that thought drove at the very center of Deeth's sanity. To the native mind the most unforgivable crime is a betrayal of trust and hospitality. The worst possible of all such betrayals is a violation of their altars. If Deeth were caught, the greatest mercy he could pray for was a quick death.

But the moment this explanation flashed upon Deeth it seemed to be set aside by a simple fact. There had been ample time for an alarm, but as yet the *barrio* was as silent as death. That was all there seemed to be in the world, silence, darkness, the rifled temple, and himself prisoned within the four walls of it.

Then a third sense began to inform his bewildered mind. He sniffed the air inquiringly. It was filled with a disagreeable odor, a strange, half-sweetish, wholly sickening odor. Deeth discovered with surprise that he was breathing heavily, as if he had been in a foot race.

Deeth was at least no coward. But as he

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stood, irresolute, caught in the maw of a menace he could feel but not yet understand, cold sweat broke out all over him. After a moment, drawn by a strange fascination of fear, he left the unyielding door and groped his way back toward the despoiled *anting-anting*.

As he moved the odor grew stronger. The difficulty of breathing increased. A sudden vaguely significant memory came to him. What had Aeila said—"*the breath of the Spirit of the Light!*"

IT IS said that in moments of mortal peril one's mind moves swiftest. It is probable that Deeth's brain was already partially stupefied. It took him many seconds to work out from that first clue even a suspicion of the whole fearful truth.

When he had wrenched upon the sacred Light, those other lights had been extinguished. That is, in some way the flow of gas had been stopped. What if the same devising mind that had contrived that stoppage had contrived the renewal of the flow? What if he himself, blindly springing a trap set for the likes of him long ago, had dropped the bar across the door?

With a low, animal-like cry, Deeth flung himself forward. His right hand found the top of a tapering metal rod. A steady pressure of gas puckered his skin as he gripped it.

With his left hand he covered another jet, and so he stood for a moment choking back the outpouring death. But it was as futile a thing as might be. The fumes from the other ten swirled around him; he was strangled, his mind reeled close to insensibility.

He flung himself to the floor and scuttled on all fours back to the door. Still crouching in the less noxious air-level, he began to pound frantically on the door. In one closed fist the pilfered stone was gripped unregarded. Forgotten too was the vengeance that waited him outside. Forgotten was everything save that one primitive desire, that eternally persistent, all-compelling instinct, to live. To live if it were but an hour longer, and if that hour were spent in torture, still to live!

His lungs were sobbing now in the very extremity of need. An agonizing weakness that was worse than pain was slowly paralyzing his limbs.

He tried to cry out, but could not. He slumped to the floor, and so into a fresher strata of air. He slapped feebly at the door, but failed to hit it.

His nerveless arm fell back. He lay spent, gasping, dying.

From the very brink of unconsciousness a sound called him back. He was too far gone to know what that sound was, or why he welcomed it. Only mysteriously it sent a command through the murky fog that enveloped his senses—a command to hold on, hold on.

Suddenly he was enveloped in a delicious coolness. He felt himself being dragged somewhere. There came a slight shock; he was on the ground outside the temple. Some one was bending over him. His sight was blurred; he could not see who it was. But he felt it was a woman. Then he knew it, for a low agonized cry broke through his stupor.

"Dee-eeth! Dee-eeth!"

It was Aeila. Aeila, mistrusting in spite of her trust, intuitively doubting in spite of her love the meaning of her rendezvous with Deeth, come to seek wisdom where she had so often found it, and, in truth finding it again. But at that moment she knew nothing save that she had found the door of the temple mysteriously barred, the lights extinguished, and her lover dying on the threshold.

She began to sob over him helplessly. And Deeth, drawing into his poisoned lungs great gulping breaths of the revivifying air, felt hope and power to plan return with his swiftly returning strength. He still had the stone; Aeila was within reach. To quickly contrive a story, to get her by any pretext into that waiting *vinta* or near it—the rest would follow easily. So he thought, and then he became aware of a weakness that was not physical, of a great, confusing shame, a longing not to force Aeila but to please her, a burning desire to hide his perfidy from her, belated knowledge of how dastardly his perfidy had been.

"Dee-eeth! Can you hear me? Speak to me, to Aeila. What is it? Why are you here? *Ah-h!*"

The last exclamation was a hoarse and inarticulate cry of fear, of anguish, of amazement approaching disbelief. For Aeila had caught Deeth's right hand, and had found in its palm the light of her life.

In the starlight the stolen stone glinted

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fitfully; it seemed to her something alive; in its lessened luster she read the result of a shameful profanation. Her hand closed over it with an instinct of protection and a feeling of sacrilege.

Deeth did not speak. Each moment his freshening blood was coursing stronger through his veins. In a little longer he would be able to act. But to what end?

"He came to take away the Light," Aeila was talking to herself. "And to take away me. The white body, the black heart! And I loved him! And I have save him," she moaned. "I have cheated the Spirit of the Light."

Suddenly she seized Deeth by the shoulder and dragged him backward.

With horror Deeth realized her intentions. She would deliver him again to the vengeance of her god. He was not as strong as he had thought himself; his kicking and struggling were futile.

His head reached the threshold and he got a whiff of the outpouring gas. At that he cried out like a mortally frightened child:

"Aeila, Aeila! Don't!"

She dropped him. She stood over him and spoke to the Light.

"I love him still. I can not."

Then she stiffened. An inspiration had come to her. She stood for a moment considering it. It was good.

Swiftly she reached down and pulled Deeth to his feet. He staggered a little, but stood alone. With one hand pointing to the beach, she pushed him away from her.

"Go!" she said.

Deeth staggered away, shambling, bent over, stumbling. But after he had taken perhaps a dozen paces he stopped. As he did so a whirling eddy of wind caught him off his balance, and he nearly fell. But he braced himself, and turned, and looked back.

In the dim light he could see Aeila standing, facing the door of the temple. He saw her put out her hand and open that door, and with profound amazement saw her step within. The door closed after her. He was alone with the night.

IN SOME things a man who has lived Deeth's life is obtuse. For a full minute Deeth's mind was a whirling chaos of wonder. Then athwart it shot a bright clear light of understanding —such a light as, once seen, leaves a man never quite the same again. It was the understanding of perfect love, and of fullest self-sacrifice.

Aeila loved the Light, and him! The despoiled altar demanded its vengeance—a vengeance of which she had cheated it. In saving his life she had sinned. Now she was giving her own in its stead.

A moment longer Deeth stood there in irresolution. The thought-habits of his old life tugged at him. Once he turned his head toward the sea. Subconsciously he noticed that all of the Eastern stars were wiped out in a hurrying drive of black clouds, such clouds as at that season spell storm. But he gave them no thought. Eclipsing them in blackness was the mental picture he had of himself. Beside his sudden vision of Aeila's pure courage, ah, how black and cowardly! Cowardly?

"Enough, enough!" he cried, and flung his hands to the heavens.

Reeling still, he started back to the temple. Through the door he plunged, flinging it wide, and in his mad haste he did not notice that it closed again on the recoil. He began to grope about in the darkness, calling loudly—

"Aeila, Aeila!"

There came no answer. Again the deadly fumes caught at his throat, attacked his lung tissues, strangling him, poisoning him. Already weak and sick, it was as if impatient Death had touched him at last with an actual, flesh-shriveling hand.

He got as far as the altar. Then he fell. And, falling, he found Aeila.

She was motionless, apparently unconscious. Deeth caught at her hand, struggled half upright, tried to drag her toward the door. He but pulled himself down again with the effort. Then his ears caught a murmur, seemingly far away.

"Dee-eeth!"

"Aeila!" Through the weak, choking cry ran a note of joy. "You are alive! You can move! Save yourself. Let me help you. I will stay—die—anything." All the time he was pulling at her feebly, but she lay inert. "Only—not you, Aeila, not you! For—I love you, Aeila. Do you understand? Real love—now—at last."

He stopped, breath and strength alike failing him, and then upon his numbing senses fell a horrible realization of treble futility. For an instant he had glanced

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toward the door and discovered it was closed.

Aeila strained toward him with palpable helplessness, and his own muscles were turned to limp and flaccid rags. And, overwrought, he had cried out his soul to her—his last message, for now he could only moan—in his own language, of which she did not know a word.

But Aeila was whispering, and even as Deeth sank swooning to the floor, he caught the wonder of her understanding.

"I—know. I am—glad. But better—me. Anyway—too late—together!"

And so the tribe found them half an hour later, when the first blast of a typhoon hit Tambaron, sparing the low and sprawling nipa shacks, but bursting through the swinging door of the temple with a mighty pressure and carrying away the roof.

And until they recovered, the tribe mourned with wailings that outvied the shriekings of the wind, for it was plain to them that Aeila and Deeth had braved the fury of the storm—in which a devil plainly rode—to save the Light, which otherwise would have been whirled away in the wreckage.

But to Aeila—and who is there that will prove she was wrong?—the storm was but the expression of the Spirit she served, with power both to punish and to forgive and spare.

So she accepted her life, and Deeth's, and if you will you may visit them today on Tamboran, and hear from Deeth, as I did, this story. You may see Aeila, and, looking into her bright and youthful eyes, you will forget the duskiness of her skin.

You may even see the altar fires and the marvelous Light, for no sooner was the temple repaired than the *balian*, who no doubt had much wisdom from his predecessors, put the stone in its place and caused the flickering flames to burn again.

Deeth busies himself in the copra trade, regarding his growing account in the Bank of Manila with interest, there being now two laughing, star-eyed youngsters who will shortly need white man's training.

Also, since Maurarato died, Deeth is the accepted head man of the village. Some say it is his rule, and some the reverence the natives bear for Aeila, and some the mystic influence of the Light, that keeps Tambaron the place of cleanest living in all the Southern Seas.

Aeila holds to the last view, and so she still labors over the flaming symbol, polishing it long and carefully each morning. This is more necessary now than it used to be, for rhinestone loses its fire with age.

But to Deeth the Light of Tambaron has never grown dim, or so he told me. It may have been more than a coincidence, however, that his eyes rested tenderly on Aeila when he spoke.

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The Camp-Fire

A meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

IN REPLY to William Brockway's inquiry at a recent Camp-Fire, W. West sends us the following from a California newspaper bearing on the lost Adams mine:

"During the early sixties Adams was a freighter between Tucson and Yuma, Ariz. On one of his trips into Tucson he was accosted by a party of five Americans and one Mexican who tried to buy his outfit of eight mules saying they wanted them to make a trip to the northwest to reach rich gold diggings which the Mexican had promised to show them in consideration of the sum of $150.

"ADAMS refused to sell the mules and later, on his return journey to Yuma, his wagons and outfit were burned by Indians while he was away hunting his lost mules.

"Returning to Tucson, Adams was again accosted by the prospectors who offered to give him a share in the diggings if he would take his mules and go along. He accepted and the party finally arrived at the place mentioned by their guide, who was then paid off and left them after cautioning them to be very careful as the country was alive with Indians.

"Gold was there in fabulous quantities from every appearance. The first afternoon they took out one hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold. They built a log-cabin and made a stone chimney and fireplace. The gold they cached under the fireplace.

"ONE day the mules strayed away and Adams followed them. On his way back, he saw a band of Apaches had surrounded the camp and were killing his companions and burning the cabin. Adams, dazed and crazed by the sight, wandered away and was finally found by some soldiers near old Fort West. The soldiers had captured some Indians and Adams, recognizing one of the captives as an Indian he had seen murdering his companions, seized a gun and shot the savage dead. For this killing Adams was arrested but later released. He left the country and never returned until the latter part of the seventies when he brought a large prospecting party from California headed for the gold-diggings. He was unable to locate the diggings and finally died in Silver City.

"In 1881 and 1882 two trips were made in search of the lost diggings.

"AN OLD Apache squaw working for the family of a post-trader north of the Black Range, told a story of her being at one time with a band of her people when they killed a lot of white men who lived in two log-cabins and who were gold diggers. This story was recognized by an old pioneer as being substantially the same transaction and locality as mentioned to him by a post doctor who had the story from Adams' family.

"This old pioneer and two companions made the trip in 1881. They found the ruins of two old fireplaces, but they could not find the gold. On his return the pioneer said, 'I really believe I found the old Adams camp, and if we had been patient and had remained a couple of days, we could have found the gold.'"

My information differs as to location and makes no mention of the name "Austin" in connection with the Adams mine as stated in Mr. Brockway's letter.

OUR old friend Harry C. Winters wrote to us of the Camp-Fire from the European front in a letter dated September 30, but I've had no opportunity to pass it on to you until now:

I expect you have almost forgotten your humble servant. It is now quite a while since I wrote you;

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ruth to tell, with illness and rapid changes from lace to place, I could rarely find the time to do ny writing at all. I know a lot of my correspondnts are vowing vengeance on me for my laxity but t can not always be helped, and I wish you could apologize in my name for me. I have had a turn at Egypt and Saloniki since last writing, besides an extensive ramble along the Western front.

EVENTS seem to be shaping themselves in our favor now, and I imagine our friends the enemy are beginning to feel the strain. The successes to our arms of this past few weeks have gone far to dishearten them, prisoners our people are taking admitting that they have felt the push very much. The prisoners do not seem to be in the same physical condition, either, that they were a few months ago, and have a very weary washed-out look. Immense amounts of unwounded men have surrendered, which speaks volumes for the manner in which the Allies' determined efforts are affecting the morale of their troops.

And now, in the Jabberwock, they have another little surprise. Great weapon though it seems to me, I have read of something like it in a magazine tale of a few years ago, the same machine in very fact being used. Anyhow Fritz doesn't like it one little bit. They tried the other day to capture one, but for them "nothing doing."

IF WE can not manage to break them within the next eight weeks, well, it's up to us for another —— Winter. They are hard, persistent and brave antagonists, to give them their due, and take an awful lot of whacking, but I do not think there is any doubt of the ultimate outcome. We don't think so, anyhow, though I expect we would be accused of being optimistic.

There is no question of the fervor of our troops; they are as they always were, and confident of success.

Still, it is time that the damnably wicked racket should soon come to an end and let us all get back to a saner way of living. But peace must not be proclaimed until this menace to the peace of the world, this curse of mutilation, is effectually crushed. May the day soon dawn.

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER, with a story in this issue, follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself. In addition to the countries he mentions he has also seen more or less of West Africa, Europe and the United States. He is now in New York.

I WAS born on the rim of the earth, to wit, inland Australia. I have traveled over every inch of Australia and New Zealand, and have visited Fiji, New Hebrides, and a number of the islands of the Malay Archipelago. I came to England in 1906, visiting South Africa on the way. I came from England to Boston.

As for adventures I have had many, but the ones that to me are the greatest might appear to you as trivial. I landed in New York in 1907 without money and without friends. I lived for three days on a pound of rice, then I took a job as conductor on the Twenty-third Street cars. I worked there eight weeks, collected the material for an article, sold it to the New York *World*, bought a second-hand typewriter with part of the money and started in to write stories.

All my little adventures on the rim of the earth pale before those three rice-fed days in New York when I hobbled round with the sole off one shoe and old Dame Pneumonia beckoning at me from every corner. I lived on the Rim where the dawn-shafts spring from space till I was thirty years of age, but the things that happen there are little three-cent happenings to the things that happen in this old burg. I'm glad that editors haven't the same opinion on this matter. But I don't want to go back to the Camp of the Fringe. It's too lonely.

YOU will remember some of our Camp-Fire discussions as to the island or islands of Tiburon in the Gulf of California. From previous data it seemed as if there were only one island, but the following letter from a comrade in Arizona now seems to establish the fact that there are more. And certainly this is a story of adventurous adventure:

May I be allowed my little bit in regard to this talk of Tiburon? Have been on them in '08, '11 and '12 and perhaps my trips may interest some of the readers.

IN 1908 my *compadre* V— and I outfitted in Yuma with a dory-shaped boat without centerboard and sailed down the Gulf of California stopping at every arroyo mouth and panning for gold. In the Altar district we had a little luck and camped two months, working early and late on a pocket of placer that brought $1,800 in Frisco afterward.

When we reached Tiburon we were out of fresh water and, as condensed water gets old after a steady diet, we put in to look for a spring. Had heard of the Seri and their reputation for cannibalism but put it down to the peon imagination. We met with some of them about a mile inland and were greeted with a bunch of arrows and a few shots from a gun that looked like an old .44 caliber Winchester.

We weren't hit but decided rather hurriedly that it was our move. They followed us to the boat and the savage with the gun kept potting at us every few minutes, but his aim was like ours—rotten. To tell the truth, we were too badly scared to shoot straight and thought only of getting away. Which we did without shedding any blood on either side. My first experience was rather brief, as I remember it.

INTENDED going back in '09 and '10, but other things cropped up and not until the many resolutions were in full swing did we land there again. In the Fall of '11 my *compadre* of the other trip and two other *amigos* with myself planned a trip to Guaymas and possibly Mazatlan to help out the *soldados* with our presence.

The customs officers of Algodone wouldn't let us through without a string of red-tape that would reach from there to the City. So we built our boat in an out-of-the-way slough close to the river and

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with much work, carrying grub and outfit to it from Yuma, finally got ready for the start. One nice dark night we slipped over the border and, after fighting the willows in Volcano Lake for about ten days, reached the gulf.

ONE word as to Volcano Lake. We had a dory-style boat 32 feet long with a beam of 7 feet —decked over fore and aft with a cockpit in the center that would seat all four of us comfortably. This boat would draw 8 inches of water light and as the lake has a channel of only four inches, you can imagine the work required to get through it. Some who have gone through it claim they found a good channel, but we didn't, and we searched for three days before tackling it.

AFTER reaching the Gulf we put in a center-board and then sailed right along until we reached the pearl fisheries on coast of California Baja. As the welcome there was so gracious we tarried just thirty minutes.

Those Jap divers were certainly cordial. Invited us to move right along, giving us fresh water only after some little persuasion and making sure we wouldn't go until we got it.

No more trouble from there to Tiburons, putting in there for water and finding it about five miles inland. Stayed there three days and saw no natives, though we kept a careful watch.

WENT on to Guaymas and Empalme and, after talking with some of C. R. Y. Y. P. boys, decided maybe we had been hasty in thinking of joining on with the revolution. Decided to wait a while and started for Mazatlan. Put in at mouth of Cocoraqui River and there had our boat confiscated after quite an argument and some shooting that left them in possession of the boat and us in possession of a knoll of rocks that made excellent cover. After charging once, they let us keep the rocks and surrounded us, intending to starve us out. But that night we slipped out and hiked to Guaymas in two more days.

A friend of mine cached us out for a week until they quieted a little and M— got over a shot in the leg. Grubstaked by this friend, we started for the border, M— and J— starting for Hermosillo and V— and I by coast route.

Nothing of note until we reached Tiburons. There, as it was low tide, we waded across Boco Inferno, meeting some natives on their way to the mainland. Didn't interfere with us. After reaching the main island we ran into some who, while not hostile, weren't particularly friendly. They gave us water and, filling canteens, we went back to the mainland. One of their number spoke some Spanish and we told him we were going north. Possibly that is why they didn't molest us.

AFTER tide came in, noticed several small islands between main island and the mainland. As at times there on the Gulf they have very high tides it may be that these are flooded, but, as they had vegetation on them, I think they are never entirely covered.

If this is the case, Mr. Marsh's opinion in the November number must be wrong and, as among the natives along the west coast they are nearly always referred to in the plural, there must be some such reason for it.

From the west side of Tiburons there are no islands, while to the south there are two, one due south, the name of which I have forgotten, and the other, called San Esteban, lies southwest. Approaching from the north, west or south, one would naturally stay on the west side, as El Boco Inferno not only is, but looks, bad for navigation. With no navigation on the east side and very little exploration, lies the reason for supposing there is only one island.

While my knowledge of the isles is not very broad, it is true, still, from seeing these four or five islands and from the plural used by natives in describing them, I take the stand that there are more than one. Also in talking with a man in Yuma who made a trip to them with a party of eastern men (with a view to stocking them with cattle—lack of water prevented) he used the plural. He claims to have a thorough knowledge of them.

The fable of precious stones and rich mines is customary of all unexplored parts of Mexico, so take no stock in them.

ON READING this over, I find that only about half of it refers to Tiburons, but will let it go as it lays. As I am writing this it is evidence that I got out O. K., though not without a brush with the Huertistas west of Micasay in which V— got a flesh-wound in the arm. Poor M— and J— got theirs— M— about 100 kilometers out of Guaymas and J— at Hermosillo.

Am going back some day when this trouble ends, but the "powers that be" would welcome me too strongly now. Like Mr. Marsh, I am a mechanical engineer and also have some material that would make reading. Was with Stanley Williams, Mosby and Tamlin in California Baja, and all of that venture hasn't been written yet.

THIS is rather a long letter, but it is my first since Camp-Fire started and I've read them all. With all due apologies to Mr. Marsh and not wanting to scare up a row, I am sending this in with the evidence that I have seen more than one isle in the group, and my *compadre* V—, having read this, agrees with all details and states that he would like to hear from some of the others down below who have been there and hold the same or contrary opinion.

A POST-CARD from Stephen Allen Reynolds tells me he is getting a taste of the Great War "somewhere in France." I was on vacation about the time he left here and heard of his departure only through others. I infer that his treasure-hunting expedition has been at least temporarily abandoned. At last reports practically all the men needed had been secured but not the rather large sum of money needed for the extensive operations planned. The post-card stated a letter would follow, so further details are to be expected.

FROM Frank H. Huston comes some interesting information about one who adventured largely in his day:

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If any one would look up this man's life history, fiction would pale into insignificance.

I knew him fairly well at one time. He was past eighty, but retained a very brilliant mind and possessed a phenomenal memory for persons and events.

His name was Crawford. He was born in Tennessee, and as a boy of twenty or thereabouts rafted down the Mississippi River to New Orleans and joined a regiment of "Rifles" for the Mexican War.

UPON his return at the conclusion of the war his uncle, who was Secretary of War, procured him an appointment to West Point where he remained a year or two and resigned, later going to Europe and participating in the Crimean War where one of the English branch of the family, Gen. Crawford, gave him an appointment as a volunteer aide on his staff.

Returning to America he built and owned the first steam yacht ever constructed, causing a big sensation with it as the newspapers of that time testify.

He was well acquainted with all the prominent national figures until after the close of the War between the States, in which he participated on the Northern side, at the close finding himself colonel of the First Tennessee Heavy Artillery, a negro regiment.

BEING a personal friend and very close to Andy Johnson, he was sent on a special mission to the Border to confer and act with Benito Juarez. Upon Sheridan's arrival there Crawford, in disgust, crossed the line and became a major-general in the Army of Liberation, fighting one battle at a point not far from Brownsville. Some friction arose or was continued between him and Sheridan and an armed clash was barely averted. His news clippings, both Mexican and American, of those events were most interesting and were in his possession as late as 1904, when, as a man of eighty-five or ninety, he was an inmate of the National Soldiers' Home at Hampton. His daughters, one of whom was married to the president or vice-president of a big railroad, kept him supplied with funds and he maintained an establishment in Phœbus near the Home, enjoying special privileges. He preferred his life as he then led it, notwithstanding that his daughters begged and implored him to make his home with them.

AFTER the Civil War he went to Egypt and, as Crawford Pasha, was major-general and chief of artillery for the Khedive, but resigned and returned to this country owing to friction, with, if I remember rightly, Lord Cromer and the English authorities.

He was a master of photography and at one of the world's fairs took photos which were later purchased by the Government.

There is much more that I have forgotten, but he, though undoubtedly dead by now, could easily be traced through the Hampton Home records and the full details secured from his family. Of course, when I knew him he was but a wreck and shadow of what he had been, but even then one could see that he was a most remarkable figure and personality.

ONE of the most pathetic letters I ever read he insisted upon my reading. It was from one of his daughters, who must have loved him dearly, imploring him to come and live with her. I was ashamed to do it but he insisted, and it was as though I had looked into her bared heart. I never spoke to him again. He laughed when I said he should do as she desired and I said I was a cad to have read it. "Pshaw! I wanted you to," he answered.

If the whole dope and the bunch of clippings, some yellow with age, could be procured, some one who could put it in shape would have a story that would put Davis' "Soldiers of Fortune" on the dump. Sorry I forget his first name and more about him, but he would be a great item for some one.

TWO letters from foreign-born men who have come to America to become citizens, in reply to Camp-Fire articles on Americanism and patriotism. The first will make you proud; the second should make you ashamed.

I am a foreign-born myself and although I have lived in the United States of America for a period of about six and one-half years I am not yet a citizen. The reason is that I have never been long enough in one place to get witnesses who can testify they have known me. But now I am settled in Detroit and think to remain here the required time so I can take out my "second papers" and become an American citizen.

I believe in America. I have seen other countries, so I know what I am talking of. When I came here I could not talk, read or write this language, and although I never went to night school, I have mastered this language only by determination to become an American. Holland (my native country) could not or would not give what I desired, and by traveling around Europe I finally made up my mind to try America, *and America has given me so far what I was looking for—a chance to make something out of myself.*

There is no country in this world that offers opportunities like America does (for the man who is willing) and therefor I say *America is my country.* —L. H. GESQUIERRE.

I have read the articles "You and Your Country" and "Are You a Quitter?" and I feel like I have something to say too.

I am a German four years in this country, but I feel at home here. When I crossed the border from Mexico into Texas I left my old country thoughts behind me and became American; so I thought, but then the European War started and Americans kidded me and teased me, so I naturally went to a German settlement and talked German again.

Now listen—if you Americans will stick together a little more and quit talking about money once in a while and talk Preparedness you'll soon be better off . . . We are all white and of the Caucasian race so why not throw all nationality in the wind, talk English and be American. . . . Don't you think that race is worth to be called American? They will fight for their homes as quick as anybody else. I am talking for the Germans in the U. S. A. So why don't stick together and fight it out together?—FRANK W. KATTEIN.

I do not know from Mr. Kattein's letter

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whether he has become an American citizen, but that is beside the main point. For the main point, as illustrated here in one of its many phases, is that the blame for hyphenism in this country lies with us native-born far more than with our citizens of foreign birth. And the more generations we have been Americans, the greater our blame.

It is too big and too many-sided a subject to try to cover here in full, but the gist of it is that it's merely stupid to expect outsiders to value and reverence our country, its institutions and laws, and the principles for which it stands when we don't value and reverence them ourselves. Or don't show our reverence when we do have it.

HAVE you ever pictured to yourself the experience of an immigrant, one who is good material and comes to this country because it is the "land of the free" and so on, comes with hopes and ideals for this newer and better land, ready and anxious to give himself to it and be a part of it? Hundreds of thousands come like that. And except for a few individuals and special societies, like drops in a bucket, we treat them with about the same amount of consideration we'd give to a shipment of dogs.

Imagine yourself in the place of one of these and then look about among native Americans for *any* word or action to indicate that Americans hold their country high or to encourage and keep burning the spark of reverence for America you brought from foreign shores. Outside of Fourth of July orations, political prostitutions of patriotic sentiments for party purposes, and occasional individual spread-eagle-ism, you would find practically *nothing* to inspire you with Americanism or to keep your own spark from going out. On the other hand you would find all about you money-madness, self-interest, neglect of the real duties of citizenship.

AND when in addition you are jeered at because you are not in all things like these neglectful native-born Americans, wouldn't it be only natural for you to lose your ideals and sympathy for America?

A foreign-born citizen talking his foreign language in this country should be ostracized, but if he tries to talk our language, however brokenly, he should be patted on the back. He is probably at heart a better American than you are.

IT'S time we got over our stupid and unjust habit of considering immigrants and foreign-born American citizens merely a curse to the country and inferior to our so noble selves. Many of them are, and the flow of immigrants to this country is a terrible menace to our future. *But the fault is wholly ours.* Every single one of them is a responsibility whose accusing finger points directly in *your* face and brands *you* as lacking—brands you and me and each one of us, not "somebody else." If he is unfit material for the making of a good American, it is *our* fault that he was ever admitted to this country. If he is good material, it is *our* fault that this good material isn't being made into what it could be made.

It's up to each of us native-born to be a *man*, not a miserable, cowardly whelp who shifts his own responsibilities to other people's shoulders.

IT WOULD probably be a good thing to stop all immigration to this country for a while, not because it isn't fit to come in but because we aren't fit to receive it. That would give us time to make ourselves fit and, when we opened the doors again, we ourselves would be real Americans and could not only turn back the bad material but make the good material into real Americans like ourselves.

ANOTHER of our Camp-Fire comrades at the European war, M. Logie of the famous Black Watch regiment, sends us word from "near Saloniki," written some time before the capture of Monastir:

Just a line to say all goes well out here with us. Am at present up-country, some seventy-odd miles from the coast and a short distance from the firing-line. It appears to be all artillery action, as far as I can see, but hope our turn will come (the "dough-boys"). Pretty rough country for infantry.

There is quite a collection of Allied troops about here, but, so far as we are concerned here, it's only a waiting game. Would sooner be back in Flanders where things are more lively.

EDGAR YOUNG, with his first story in our magazine, rises and introduces himself in accordance with Camp-Fire custom:

IN THE early days my old grandpap, Wash Young, crossed the Lovelady Gap into Wild Cat Valley, Virginia, looking for a place to settle. He had walked from some place in Ohio and had

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all his earthly belongings in a pillow-case. He blazed the corners of a farm, married the daughter of a settler named Spencer, raised a family, grew rich and respected and died at a ripe old age.

The first thing I can remember is crawling up on a chair and gazing through a dingy little window up the Lovelady Gap. I yearned to explore that gap. I can remember that just as well as if it were yesterday. I can still see the trees on the top of Lovelady as I saw them then, little match-stick things with bushy tops and I tried to find out if they were full-grown trees. I know now, but I did not know then, what this yearning was. It was the gipsy blood, the Ramblelust bequeathed me by that same Wash Young who had ventured after the elusive rainbow-end to the world's four corners before he crossed down through Lovelady Gap into Wild-Cat Valley.

AT THE age of five I ran away up the Lovelady. Searching parties found me late that night several miles from home. Our family was in a feud with another family over a grist-mill which some of my people and some of theirs had owned at one time or another. My uncle, living over across Wallen's Ridge, got into a fist-fight with one of the other tribe at a molasses stir-off. The next night this man's son set fire to our house while we were sleeping; a man who was passing saw him and told about it afterward.

That same night I saw the Lovelady Gap. My father, mother, two sisters and myself escaped just as the house fell in, in our night-clothes and barefooted. I was six years old and I also remember that very distinctly. It was in the early part of December. The ground was frozen and covered with about an inch of powdery snow. We walked eight miles that night to my uncle's house—at least I walked part of it and my father carried me the rest. I remember that the bottoms of our feet came off and our tracks were red with blood. When we passed the house of the man who had burned ours, we heard the door open easily and a head was thrust forth.

My father paused. He spoke easily, as if he were in conversation.

"Sammy," he said, "I am going to kill you for this."

He knew before he found out from the man who passed in the road and saw Sammy's face by the light of the torch, that Sammy had done it.

BUT Sammy died from consumption while we were yet at my uncle's. We moved back into Wild-Cat Valley for a short while and then to Big Stone Gap. Of the boom days of Big Stone Gap I would advise every one who has not done so, to read John Fox, Jr.'s "Trail of the Lonesome Pine." My father was cleaned out along with the rest.

While the boom lasted there was excitement enough for any one. When the bottom dropped out, Big Stone Gap died dead as a herring and did not revive for twenty years. At the age of twelve, finding things rather prosaic, I climbed into a coke-car and hoboed to Louisville, Ky., two hundred and seventy miles away. I came back in empty box-cars and coal-hoppers and finished out that term of school. During vacation I started in as water-boy in the iron-ore mines, but ran away again to Norfolk, over five hundred miles from Big Stone Gap.

There wasn't anything wrong at home. Everything was all right. It was that gipsy blood in me that was beginning to work. After I had gone on a trip and returned ragged and famished, I felt like working for a while. I was water-boy, boiler-makers' helper, carpenters' helper, plumbers' helper and later axman with a surveying party in the tan-bark woods. I helped in all departments of erecting an oak-bark extract works and when it was finished I was made barrel-house man and shipping-clerk. I was sixteen years old and weighed a hundred and seventy.

BUT one night I put on two pairs of trousers, two or three shirts and beat it away on a freight train. I was gone for three months. I learned to ride trucks, rods, tops and blinds. I also learned how to batter back doors and throw my feet. Now I didn't *have* to do this. I could have stayed on the job I had at home or I could have got many others in any town I struck. I could have written home for money when mine ran out, but I was a vagabond by choice and inclination. I confess it shamelessly. I wanted to sit by hobo camp-fires and hear blowed-in-the-bottle stiffs tell of their lives and help them get up "combinations" for mulligans.

But I came back after three months and got a job as helper in the express office. The express agent was also the Western Union operator. He laid off for a few days and a rambling telegrapher came to relieve him. He had worked for several roads and explained how easy it was to obtain work as an operator anywhere in the country. I started in to learn telegraphy and learned it in four months. I called up the chief dispatcher in Middlesboro, Ky., of the L. & N. and asked him for work. His division ran from Corbin, Ky., to Norton, Va. He sent me a pass to come in and after giving me an examination sent me to Barboursville as night operator. His name was J. B. Hoover. He fired me a few months later. I caught on with the S. A. & O. road at Big Stone Gap. I quit this and went to the Southern on the old K. & O. division between Knoxville and Jellico.

THEN I began to work for some railroads. I worked for every railroad of any size in the United States. I worked for sixty-eight separate roads and sometimes I worked for the same road on different divisions half a dozen times. I went to Canada and worked from one end to the other of the C. P. R. I have crossed Canada four separate times. I also worked for the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific. I was in every big city. I was in every State in the Union. I have hit Laggan, Alberta, with a Summer suit of clothes on and a straw hat in the dead of Winter, and I have struck Yuma, Arizona, in the dead of Summer with long Canadian wool underclothes on. It took me from the time I was past sixteen until I was twenty-one to do this.

The "boomer" who relieved the man at Big Stone Gap had told the truth. A man can always get a job and he can always ride if he is an operator and has a card.

I STAYED at home four days. I hadn't seen Mexico yet. I went straight to Nogales. A Mexican conductor carried me on my card (O. R. T.) to Guaymas. They were building from Guaymas

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to Mazatlan. I worked the relay job in Empalme until the road was connected up, then I was sent to Mazatlan. I was private operator for the chief engineer, Mr. S. L. Wakelewicz, in Urias for several months. When the "front" was moved to Chispa I made a couple of trips as express messenger and then I decided I would go overland to Panama.

I hired a mule and rode over to Acaponeta, where I caught the stage. I rode this stage a day and part of a night into Tepic. Here I met up with the man I have called Eugene Rodin. The trip from there to Panama is just about as the story has it. A few things I left out were that we were hired as body guards in Guatemala City for a famous old American general. Our nominal titles were aides-de-camp, but our job was to pack a couple of automatics and see that the general was not assassinated.

A THING that struck me as ludicrous happened on the trail from Marischal to Cavallo Blanco, Guatemala. We overtook a man riding a mule. We walked along with him for several leagues. We came to a small native town that I have forgotten the name of and he asked one of us to ride his mule through while he got the *jefe politico* to sign his book. What book? Why he was supposed to be *walking* around the world. He was going to sell the mule just before he got into Guatemala City. We caught the train to the city from Cavallo Blanco and a week or so later this Irish-American pedestrian blew in. We never queered him so he raised some money on his gift of gab and beat it out again.

I worked in Panama as steam-shovel craneman, locomotive craneman, and stiff-leg runner. There were not any telegraph jobs to be had.

"EUGENE RODIN" and I won $9,000 in the lottery. We quit and rode out from Colon on the *Thames* of the Royal Mail line. We went to Barbados where we caught a Russian tramp, the *Merkador*, for Rio. We signed on as purser and supercargo, but we paid our fare. We lost what was left of the $9,000 playing roulette in the Politicus Club on the Lapa. We walked four hundred and eighty miles to Sao Paolo. I went overland to Argentine by rail, "Rodin" went by boat. We came back to Rio by boat and went to work. I was accountant for a big American company at a good salary. Wages are very high in Brazil. I was stenographer and later private secretary for a general manager of an electrical supply concern in Sao Paolo.

We went to Argentine again, went around through the straits to Valpo. We went into the accounting game. We had to chuck several bluffs but at last we were good enough to hold down a desk in any office. We worked as accountants in Lima, Callao, and Cerro de Pasco with now and then a week or so as stenographer. We worked in Guayaquil when yellow-jack was raging. They were having a revolution and the high-country Indians died like flies with fever when they came down into the low country. A mob burned old man Alfaro in the plaza at Quito along with several others.

WE CAME back to Panama and both caught on this time in the telegraph department. We went down into Colombia, Venezuela, and then up the Amazon to Manaos. Coming back to Panama we heard that the General Manager of the National Roads of Nicaragua was at the Hotel Central. We saw him and he employed us. "Rodin" (by his real name) was general storekeeper and I helped put in the accounting system and was general auditor and disburser. The road is 220 miles long and has steamers on the Gran Lago and also down the San Juan to the Atlantic. The road is owned jointly by Brown Bros., bankers, of New York, and the Nicaraguan government. Thomas O'Connell, the general manager, was making a real railroad out of it. I was with him seven months and resigned. I didn't have time to stay any longer. I wanted to get up into Mexico and see how the revolution was coming on.

I HIT San Francisco (you don't hear me calling it Frisco, Mr. Californian) about two years ago. I drifted across to New York and picked out a small town on eastern Long Island to recuperate. I had been going at a high rate of speed for sixteen years. I needed a rest and I am getting it. When I get rested up I am going to see the rest of this little ball we call the earth. I am thirty-two years old. My musings on lonely trails have made me somewhat a theist and since working in Panama I feel that socialism would not be such a failure if we had old Col. Geo. and a few more like him at the head of it, if it is ever given a trial.

THE following letter irom "somewhere in France," dated September 17, is passed on to us of the Camp-Fire through the courtesy of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, to one of whose staff it was addressed:

Thank you so much for your cheery letter. If ever I wanted one it was to-day. It is a tough old battle and to make matters worse it has poured buckets for the past two days. This moving warfare is quite a different one to the siege business we have been doing. Then you had time to dig in deep and really make yourself tolerably cozy. Here it is just ——. I am not exaggerating when I say that there are 300 guns of all calibers, ranging from 15-inch to a 3-inch, blazing away within a radius of less than a mile. When you are able to snatch a few hours' sleep you put ear-protectors in your ears. Never wear them otherwise, as you can not hear the other fellow's shell coming.

Our Division has won golden laurels. For six months we held one of the most important salients of our line and never lost an inch, and when they put us up to one of the toughest jobs we did it, with our Irish pipers playing "The Wearing of the Green." They followed our rolling barrage magnificently, were on the Bosche before he started his barrage, and gained their objective.

The Bosche organization is wonderful and they are very gallant fighters. . . . . .

I had the pleasure of seeing a (German) cousin of mine in the prisoners' cage. He had had a —— of a time. Wet through for two days, not much grub, and dazed with the terrific bombardment. He has got my cigarette-case, which happened to be full at the time, and I have his Iron Cross, which he gave me for safe keeping. . . . Now close I must, as the "strafe" starts in another hour—3 A.M. — —— ——

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THE utter and ridiculous collapse, at its first practical test, of the Militia system and the half-baked idea of a "Federalized" National Guard, has caused a tremendous ground-swell in favor of universal military training. It is the most efficient and the most *democratic* plan.

Mark down your Congressman. Watch him. Keep a record of his vote on every Defense measure. Then, when he comes up for re-election, register your vote for the candidate who *really* stands for *real* National Defense. Also your U. S. Senator.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

A free department for the benefit of those readers who wish to buy or sell back copies of this magazine.

Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Complete file, Vol. 1, No. 1, to date—$10 plus freight.—WESLEY FALES, Darby, Mont.

Nov. 1910 to May 1911 complete; 1911, Aug., Sept., Nov., Dec.; 1912, Feb., Mch., June, July, Sept., Oct.; 1913, June, Sept.; 1916, Jan.—H. B. CHURCH, Massachusetts Realty Owners, 44 Bromfield St., Boston.

1911, Dec., 1912, all except Dec., $2.25. Carriage extra. —MRS. L. K. JACKSON, 2106 Eye St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Wanted: June 1912. State price. MAX RITTENBERG, Flatiron Bldg., New York.

1910, Nov., Dec.; 1911, complete with 1 extra of Jan. and Mch.; 1912, Jan., June, Aug., Nov.; 1913, May, June; 1914, complete; 1915, complete except June and Aug.; 1916, Jan., Feb., Mch., Apl., May, June, Nov., Dec. 15 cents each.—W, Box 1, Norwalk, Huron County, Ohio.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use only a very few fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

ADVENTURERS' CLUB—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

ORDER OF THE RESTLESS—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 542 Engineers Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

CAMP-FIRE—Any one belongs who wishes to.

NATIONAL SCHOOL CAMP ASS'N—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

HIGH-SCHOOL VOLUNTEERS OF THE U. S.—A similar organization coöperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address EVERYBODY'S, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

RIFLE CLUBS—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of every six or seven inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue or the one—or possibly two—following it.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted by a Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea

FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE, *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal, Can. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; especially, seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

2. Eastern U. S., Part 1

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

3. Western U. S.

E. E. HARRIMAN, 2336 West 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering, with assistants, west of meridian 105; game, fur, fish, camp, cabin; mines, minerals, mountains, desert.

4. North American Snow Countries

C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering the canoe and snowshoe country of U. S. and Canada (the nearer north); methods and materials of summer and winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

5. The Balkans

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

6. Asia, Southern

GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 Nagle Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, travelling.

7. Russia and Eastern Siberia

A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), 1255 Peoples Gas Bldg., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

8. Africa. Part 1

CAPTAIN F. FRANKLIN, Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Cape Colony, Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Natal, Rhodesia; routes, outfits, guides, expenses.

9. Africa. Part 2

THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

10. Islands and Coasts

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

STANDING INFORMATION

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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THIS month several editors have added new departments to "Ask Adventure" and, in this issue or the next, give you an account of their experiences and training in their respective fields. In addition we are publishing some sample questions and answers in order to give you a definite idea of the kind of service that is offered. Both questions and answers this month are furnished by the department editors. By the next issue or the issue following there will have been time to receive real questions from readers sent in after reading the first announcements of "Ask Adventure" and to print in the magazine such of them as have most general interest and value. As you know, a magazine has to work several months ahead—material reaching us on a certain date can not appear in the magazine until the second or third issue after that date.

BUT don't forget that the inquirer himself receives his answer by mail at once, direct from the Department Editor of whom he asks his question. The publishing of some of these answers in the magazine is for the benefit of our readers in general. It means putting into your hands every month specialized and expert information that is often difficult or impossible to get anywhere else.

It means, also, an interesting, intimate look-in on countries, people and ways of living that to many of us are unknown quantities. Sometimes the pointers picked up in "Ask Adventure" may mean to some of you much labor or suffering saved, mistakes avoided, even the saving of limb or life. Who can say?

At least I think it will make interesting reading for all of us.

AS TO the practical service rendered to the inquirers themselves, well, send in your question to the Department Editor in whose field it belongs. These editors have taken up this work not because they have to, but because they are themselves interested in the fields they cover and because they enjoy introducing others to these fields and helping them by giving the benefit of their own experience and knowledge. None of them has much use for frills and formalities and you'll find them as kindly and human as they find you.

Send in your question.

Question:—"Would like to make a trip on a fishing schooner to the banks. Have never been to sea as a sailor, but am strong and willing to rough it. Could I work my passage or would I have to pay? How can I do it? How should I act on board if taken?"

Answer, by Department No. 1, Frederick William Wallace:—Go down to the fish pier at Boston or Gloucester and find the skipper of a vessel. Tell him what you want to do. He may take you for a trip. You would be no good to him in working your passage. There is no work for green hands on a fisherman. Offer to square up with the cook for your grub and act as a good fellow with the men. Avoid superior airs—fishermen consider themselves as good as you are, no matter what you may be. Appreciate their kindness in having you as a shipmate and bear a hand around decks. Avoid arguments and keep on the good side of the cook. Next to the skipper, he is the most important man aboard. A nice trip for a green hand is on a mackerel seiner in the Summer.

Question:—"What are the chances of sport in the Balkans in peace times?"

Answer, by Department No. 5, A. D. H. Smith:—A sporting tour in the Balkans would not be very expensive, except for the distance to be traveled from the United States. Again, expenses vary in the different countries. For example, hunting would be more costly in Rumania than in Bulgaria. On the whole, the field of game is good. There are still bears in the mountains; I have seen them myself. And the beech forests of the Rhodopes contain some noble wild boar. Wolves can be shot in Winter. The roe-deer is fairly common; the red deer less so. Wildcats have been reported in the forest districts. The chamois is found in the high Balkans. Game birds abound and there is first-rate trout-fishing in the mountain streams, while salmon can be caught in the Danube. I can imagine no more pleasant outing than could be furnished by a hunting-box in the mountainous region of either Bulgaria, Serbia or Rumania. Albania is rather savage as yet for casual sport, and he would be a venturesome hunter who would undertake such an expedition without first making sure of the friendship of his neighbors.

Question:—"Are any of the streams in eastern Tennessee navigable for small boats? How far could I go in a skiff or canoe? What outfit would I need?"

Answer, by Department No. 2, Mr. Spears:—North and South Forks of the Holston River are navigable in canoe or skiff from above the Virginia Line—from Saltville, Virginia, for example. Logs are rafted down Clinch River from Scott County, Virginia, on "tides" or high water. You would find, in low water, occasional dams to carry over or around. Either skiff or canoe would serve, and you would need a tent, cooking utensils and a grub-box. Supplies would be had at ford stores, settlements and farms along the way. You could go clear to New Orleans, 2,000 miles."

Question:—"Recently in a book on Siberia, I read that the hunters put on "chuni" when they were starting on a Winter hunting-trip. I wondered whether "chuni" meant special gloves, headgear, or is it a local name for skis?"

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Answer, by Department No. 7, Colonel A. M. Lochwitzky:—In Eastern Siberia, where the Winters are long and very cold, the feet of the hunters have to be especially taken care of. The local people found out from bitter experience that the best footwear is made not of leather, but of felt—a non-conductor of heat. So "chuni" are boots, made out of four-ply felt, stitched lengthwise and quilt-fashion. The soles are made of thick felt, eight or ten ply high, with the outer sole either covered with thin leather or smeared with grease so as to make the boots waterproof. I have been, for days, wading through deep snow and yet the feet were dry and warm, when I had these home-made "chuni" on.

Question:—"My brother carries a belt-ax and my cousin carries a long, heavy knife-bayonet when on camping trips. They argue much over the merits of the two. What would you advise me to get for the same uses?"

Answer, by Department No. 3, E. E. Harriman:—Both have advantages, but for my own personal use I prefer my knife, made from a twelve-inch file and tempered in oil. It is strong and carries an edge extremely well. I use it for all sorts of purposes, having chopped trees five inches thick with it and trimmed them up to build a shack. It makes an ideal weapon for close fighting and you can carve raw or cooked meat with it to perfection. Such a tool should be carried in a metal-lined sheath. Mine hangs in one that has a lining of heavy galvanized iron, lap-jointed and soldered, with leather cover, has a strong cross-guard of brass and hilt of hard wood from Central America, with knob below to give better grip.

Question:—"I am making a hunting trip through Borneo. What equipment would you advise me to take?"

Answer, by Department No. 6, Gordon McCreagh:—In the absence of any specific information as to what you, personally, have a fancy for, I would advise you not to clutter yourself up with a whole lot of gear on this side.

To reach Borneo you will probably transship either at Calcutta or at Singapore; and at either of those places you will find stores which carry a full line of sporting equipment suitable to the climate and conditions you will meet. There is always somebody in these stores who has had experience and will be able to give you all the advice you may need.

Question:—"What sort of canoe will be suitable for two men pleasure-cruising in the Hunter's Island region of Ontario?"

Answer, by Department No. 4, C. L. Gilman:—Portages are hard and numerous and lakes big and prone to kick up a heavy sea. This indicates a canoe as light as is consistent with seaworthiness. My personal choice is a sixteen-footer, cedar and canvas, American made, thirty-three or thirty-four inch beam, a foot deep amidships, width carried well forward and aft, moderately high at the ends, bottom more round than flat, with keel. Many prefer the eighteen-footer; I do not, because extra length makes it harder to control in side or quartering wind and increased weight adds to the labor of the portage. The canoe described, save for the keel, closely approximates lines and dimensions of birch-bark canoes built by Indians of this region. For further and fuller suggestions see "The Canoe," by Robert E. Pinkerton, Outing Publishing Company, New York.

West Africa

I NEVER really lived till I struck Africa, so I will not trouble readers with my dull boyhood in an English village, the sequent fettered years in an English business house, and the longings for the wide, wide world eventually realized. But I might say that if I had had sense I would have fitted myself for some job beyond the horizon, and perhaps, had I been American, would have done so, instead of answering every foreign advertisement that appeared in the papers and worrying acquaintances fortunate enough to secure appointments in the outskirts of the British Empire. Had I been born west of the Rockies I would have known there is a way to whatever one desires, supposing one has the pluck and application.

Just how the Royal Niger Company fell for me is to this day a mystery. Enough that I became the proud possessor of an agreement that smelled of *palavers* with sultan and emir and fabulous presents and cannibals and adventure and everything else a fed-up imagination could desire. No less a personage than the Earl of Scarborough signed the agreement, in an interview that was made up largely of silence, and in which my chief worry was whether I should be flunkeying if I addressed the Great Personage as Your Grace. I believe that, in my anxiety to avoid that, I fell into the opposite error of undue familiarity. It never struck me that perhaps the Company was as anxious for men as I was to acknowledge it as my employer. It is a great mistake to underrate oneself.

AND now, having read the autobiographies of my co-Department Editors, I am appalled to discover that I know a whole lot superficially and nothing specifically. Except Africa. I am sure I know Africa and Africans because I am so riled at the Africa the popular writers are serving up to the public. Also I know something of the flora and birds and beasts of the tropics, and something about outfitting and the idiosyncrasies of savages. I know jungle, desert and forest. I know them painfully. I know how to avoid doctors' bills, to dispense with a cook, to enjoy gastronomically what the country offers and, as we say in Africa, to "travel light," which means dispensing with grip and scrip and letters of introduction.

Of course I made "notes." Kipling has attested that when one experiences a new experience one rushes to writing. Africa was one big experience. My notes are so lurid I am afraid no editor would stand for them in the raw. I have to sugar them, tone them down.

I'll be very glad to tell what I know about Africa from the years I spent there. No man, of course, knows it all.—THOMAS SAMSON MILLER.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

SELLS, WILLIAM M., last seen in Boise, Idaho, Oct., 1911. Perhaps in Alaska or Canada, as he was interested in prospecting. Was reported seen in Seattle about 4 years ago. Light brown hair, blue eyes, full forehead, 5 ft., 135 lbs., 37 or 38 years. Tips of first two fingers and thumb on left hand are missing. Miners take notice. Aged mother is very anxious.—Address MRS. FRANK MURDOCK, Fallbridge, Wash., or MRS. J. H. SELLS, R. No. 1, Eagle, Idaho.

BEDINGFIELD, "PINK," last seen in Denver, Colo., from where he shipped his suit-case to Norton, Kansas. Was in Denver last July 15th, but had not arrived in Norton by August 1st.—Address EARL FAIRES, or Ray Shook, Box 6, Rockwall, Texas.

REED, WILLIAM, left St. Johns, N. B., about 1876 or 1877 for England and from there to Australia. Had one letter from him in 1881. Any one having information please write.—Address FRED A. REED, 1 Gay St., Roxbury, Mass.

"RECKLESS BILLY," let us know your present address. Mail addressed to you at San Francisco did not reach you. We are leaving for Irkutsk. Address us at Shanghai —LONNIE THURSTON.

PASCHALL, HULA, last heard of in Chicago, August, 1914. Lost track of her while a resident of Mexico City, Mexico. Unable to forward or get mail. Dark hair and eyes, 5 ft. It will be to her advantage to communicate with her sister.—Address MRS. BESSIE REED, 30 Ave. E., Lawton, Okla.

RUNDLE, EDGAR, last heard from in Mexico. Served in U. S. M. C. 1903-1907, was with me in the Islands 1904-1906, would like to hear from him. Would also like to hear from men in "G Battery" U. S. M. C. in Cavite, P. I., 1904-1905.—Address Sergt. FRANK STUBBE, U. S. Marine Corps, Recruiting Station, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In each February issue all unfound names, inquired for during the two preceding years, will be printed again.

HOFFMAN, ALBERT F., last seen in Centralia, Wash., Aug. 1907. Left home at 1617 Oregon St., Berkeley, Cal., Aug. 19, 1906. Thought of going to Seattle. Was working for the Martin Lumber Co. during 1907. Was 27 years Nov. 6, 1916, 5 ft.—Address F. B. HOFFMAN, 1740 Bencroft Way, Berkeley, Calif.

MURRAY, "EDITH," with you in Sydney, Australia, 1902. Same boat *Taiyuan* to Manila, Philippines. Again in Yokohama, Japan, 1907. Later in Sandakan, Borneo, 1911. Received your last letter from Bangalore, saying you were on your way to Chemulpo. Wrote you there. No answer. Left islands March this year. Write at once. Remember March 24th, eighteen-San Francisco-Goplxt.—Address L. T. 345.

ASH, CAPTAIN GEORGE, cowboy. Was with him in Mexico and was in several battles and raids. He was wounded and made prisoner in battle of Mexicali. Later he escaped and went to Havana, Cuba; from there he went to South America. I have a good mining proposition for him.—Address TEXAS JACK, care Gen. Del., Quebec, Can.

RUSSELL, H. S., formerly of Toronto, Can. If this reaches you will you please write. I am discharged and would like to know how you are.—Address A. W. RUSSELL, 259 Salem Ave., Toronto, Can.

HAGER, ROBERT, last heard from in Honolulu. Shipmate of mine on *Philadelphia*, American Line, May, 1912.—Address G. K. ADAMS, Y. M. C. A., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

RAYMOND, GEORGE H., last heard of in Toledo, Oct., 1914. Traveled for magazine company. Dark hair and eyes, 6 ft., 160 lbs. Any information gladly received.—Address M. MCCURDY, 532 So. Erie St., Toledo, O., 2nd Apt.

FARNSLEY, ALLIE A., my father, last heard of in Louisville, Ky., where he had resided for over thirty years. Brown eyes, auburn curly hair, 200 lbs., 6 ft.—Address MRS. FANNIE DEATRICK, or grandson A. W. DEATRICK, 811 Topeka Ave., Topeka, Kans.

MRS. ———, maiden name Wallace, who has a sister in Correctionville, Ia., and was last heard of at Frazer Lake, Can. Cousin wishes to hear from you.—EUGENE WALLACE (Ex-gob.), 50 E. 42d St., New York.

HASSLER, CHARLES, last heard from in Grandin, Cass County, N. Dak., about 1911 or 1912. L. H., formerly of Lykens, Pa., but now of Tamaqua, Pa., would be glad to hear from him or any of his friends.—Address L. H., 126 Spruce St., Tamaqua, Pa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CONNORS, JOHN, or Ed. Clarke, last heard from in 1906 in M. U. S. N. Your mother and sisters, Bertha and Margaret would like information.—Address MRS. MARGARET ERICKSEN, Box 491, Anaconda, Mont.

HECKERT, HARRY H., or "Texas Joe" Tracy. Any one knowing of their whereabouts please let me know. —Address L. T. 342.

ARNOLD, EDWARD A.—S. P. Bush, last heard of in Shawnee or Amarillo, Tex., Fall and Winter 1914. His pal, Bob, wants to locate him.—EDWARD R. BURNS, 166 Bridge St., Gary, Ind.

BROWN, JAMES CARROLL, last heard of in Seattle, Wash., 1911, with an electrical company. Good shot, tall, Texan.—Address F. A. PROCTOR, Box 583, Asbury Park, N. J.

BAUST, HENRY, crossed Everglades 1912. Expected to leave Montana Fall 1912 for trans-Bolivian expedition. Short, thick-set; sailor and prospector.—Address F. A. PROCTOR, Box 583, Asbury Park, N. J.

DAUGHTER of William Stewart and my stepsister. Have not seen her for more than twelve years. Was at that time a resident of Twenty-First Ave., Milwaukee. Please write.—Address WILLIAM STEWART, Steamer *B. Lyman Smith*, Marine P. O., Detroit, Mich.

KORNS, PAUL, Sergt. Shields, Ben Bormor, Henry Pullman and Frank Harrington. Would like them to drop me a card if this reaches their eye.—Address HERMAN J. RATTERMAN, 1420 20th St., Douglas, Ariz.

RECKLESS, where are you?—Address L. T. 344.

SARGENT, RICHARD INGALLS, write Jack at once. Good news.—Address X. Y. X.-S., care *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GIBSON, ARTHUR E. (Art or Ed), last heard of at Block 4, Kansas City, Mo., in 1911. Telegraph operator. Will any one knowing his present address please write his brother.—Address PAUL N. GIBSON, Ocean Falls, B. C., Canada.

LOVELL, JACK, left for Philippines on an American Bark. Was with me in the Sagetines.—Address L. T. 343.

FLANIGAN, MR. OR MRS. CHAS., last heard of in Altoona, Pa., 1909. Left there probably for Milwaukee, Wis. Both small build, age 30. Husband has both legs missing, and right arm.—Address J. S. HANNAH, 1317 Walnut St., McKeesport, Pa.

DE LANO, FRANK M., last heard from in Chicago. Printer. Light brown hair, slate-color eyes, 5 ft., 40 years.—Address C. B. GLEASON, E. 2720 Third Ave., Spokane, Wash.

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UNDERWOOD, LEW ELLIAN, last heard of in Canal Zone, Panama, about Jan., 1913, when he was leaving for Mexico. Left New Boston, Texas, in 1905.—Address AUSTIN M. UNDERWOOD, U. S. N., Receiving Ship, Norfolk, Va.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In each February issue all unfound names inquired for during the two preceding years, will be printed again.

KING, JIM, was with you at Akron, Mansfield and W. P. Junction. Let me hear from you.—A. N. SHELDON, Blasdell, N. Y.

$50 REWARD for definite information that will lead to the absolute location of my son, Dr. E. J. Burnett, formerly of Portland, Ore., St. Louis and Kansas City, Mo. Wish to start him in business; also conditional inheritance awaits him.

He is 38 years, height 5 ft. 6 in., weight 175 lbs., hair dark, scar on forehead in edge of hair, brown eyes, wears mustache and goatee. Has erect carriage, habitual smoker, registered physician in Oregon and Missouri, practised as advertising physician in Portland, Ore., St. Louis, and Kansas City, Mo. Has disappeared from Kansas City Dec., 1912; treated in St. Louis City Hospital July, 1913; disappeared from Sikeston, Mo., Nov. 11, 1913. Last seen in Sacramento, Cal., Portland, Ore., and Seattle, Wash., Fall of 1914. Working as a laboring man in northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri on Mississippi River about Sept., 1913. He has also been in Mexico. Was seen in Chicago Aug. 22, 1916. Also Ohio, Nov., 1916.—Address S. E. BURNETT, 301 W. Myrtle St., San Antonio, Texas, until May 31, 1917; address after that date, S. E. BURNETT, Council Grove, Kansas, or FRED LANCASTER, Chief of Police, San Antonio, Texas.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the January or February issue of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BEVEL, WILEY R.; Bowles, Mrs. Fred; Clancy or Clancey, Timothy; Coyle, Arthur, native of Pa.; Cullen, met on Joy Line from New York to Providence; Curtis, George; Darling, Chas. H.; Dillert, Howard, born in Bethlehem, Pa.; Dunn, Mark M., Sr., and Mark M., Jr.; Fish, Eber; Graham, Joseph Alex; Hipple, Clyde; Hoffman, A. C.; Howley, Jim, formerly of Edmonton, Alta, Can.; Keene, John; Kellogg, Kenneth (James or Frank Barry); Kopp, Elmer V.; Liberatic, Eugen; McCarthy, J. J.; Mac, G. F. R.; Merrill, Russell; Nesbit, Henry; Nickerson, Joseph, cigarmaker; Olson, Ole.; Palmer, A. M., Jr.; Reid, Blair McD.; Robinson, Boyd; Stuart, Harry (Curly); Swanander, Gust and Pete; Talmadge, George W. and Ruben W.; Tyler, George; Welch, Douglas; White, John S., disappeared from home Aug. 5, 1913; White, Thomas J.; Whitmore, Francis M.; Williams (Santiago Bill).

MISCELLANEOUS—Parties who participated in expedition to Tiburon Island about eighteen months ago. Boys of the 97th Battalion, C. E. F., American Legion, also boys of the 16th Platoon, D Company.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Gaynor Maddox, Mrs. Maude Thomas, Hastlar Gal Breath, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned in our ad on page 2, the following strong features are scheduled for the April issue of ADVENTURE, in your hands March 3d:

Fire Mountain *By Norman Springer*

You've read the first part of this thrilling tale of the Northern sea. Next month the "Happy Family" land on an island in the smoky Bering and strange adventures befall them.

Finished *By H. Rider Haggard*

The Zulu nation has decided for war. Now comes the struggle between Britain's might and the native cunning of this famous African race. With *Allan Quatermain* you live again through one of history's most dramatic moments.

Dex Weaver's Conversion *By Robin Anderson*

A new writer tells of one man who, during the early, trying days in the Philippines, helped bring the light of civilization to a race which had been taught to hate and distrust all white men; and of another who hated this man who served his brothers.

A Case at Law *By William Dudley Pelley*

One of the West's famous lawyers resorts to the law of frontier days and hands out justice through the barrel of his old six-gun.

Danny and Number Nine *By Irving Crump*

Danny is a born engineer; Number Nine is one of those baby locomotives which wheezed down-town on the New York elevated railroads with commuters of other days. Both do noble service for a little jungle republic, down in those latitudes where armies have more officers than men.

Fifty-Fifty with Bonnie *By W. C. Tuttle*

There are tall times at *Hank Padden's* ranch when the outfit from the "Seven-A" bring back a dozen girls and two straight-laced chaperones from town—especially after *Chuck Warner*, champion liar of the State, circulates a few stories.

The Code of His Fathers *By Hapsburg Liebe*

"A life for a life!" This is the code of the Tennessee mountain folk even in our Twentieth Century, as Mr. Liebe shows in this powerful tale.

Conchita of the Laughing Eyes *By Hays Bell*

Conchita lived in the days of '46 when a thin column of boys in blue under Taylor struck into the heart of old Mexico. And when you learn what happened to *Captain Micky O'Brien*, after he spied her in Monterey, you'll agree he should have stuck to the order he so often gave—"Eyes front and center!"

"He Smile; He Go Sleep" *By Theodore Seixas Solomons*

Even along the wind-swept Alaskan shores of the Arctic Ocean the U. S. Mail must be delivered. In this tale you meet one of Uncle Sam's mailmen up there at the top of the world, and you find out the stuff he is made of.

APRIL ADVENTURE

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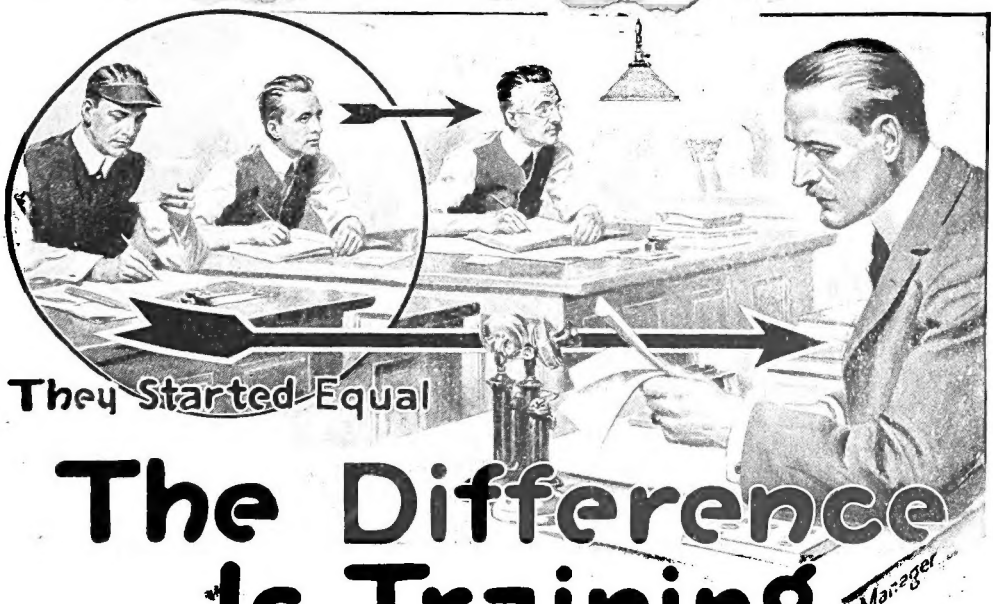

The Difference Is Training

These two men, like thousands of others, started side by side at desks in a row—equal.

One stood still. Today he's just a little older, just a little more discouraged—but right where he started.

The other has grown to a position of responsibility and command with all its accompanying advantages and comforts. The big difference in these men's lives is *Training*.

The failure had the same opportunities, as much spare time, as much natural ability as the man who won. They *started* equal.

But the successful man looked ahead; he saw that the man who climbs to a high position is the man who trains himself for bigger work. And he had the pluck, the determination to get that training in spare time while others idled. He *won*.

Go where you will, you will find thousands of such men who have risen from the ranks to positions as Chiefs of Departments, Superintendents, Managers, Presidents, solely through training secured through the help of the International Correspondence Schools.

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- ☐ Metallurgist or Prospector
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...en the Rattlesnake Struck

Judge!

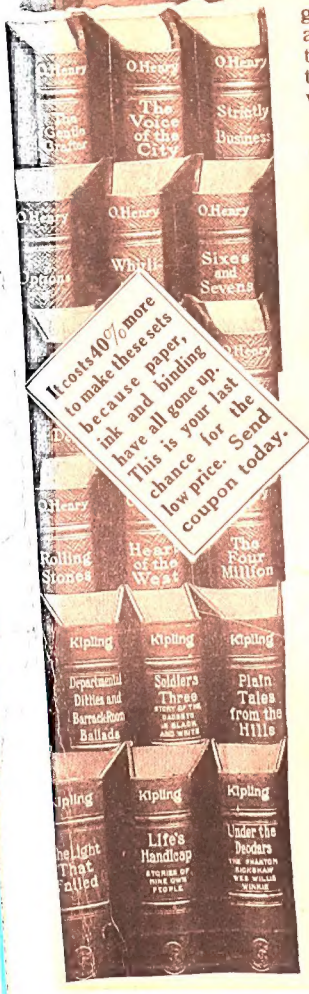
When you sent me up for four years, you called me a rattlesnake. Maybe I am one—anyhow, you hear me rattling now. One year after I got to the pen, my daughter died of—well, they said it was poverty and the disgrace together. You've got a daughter, Judge, and I'm going to make you know how it feels to lose one. I'm free now, and I guess I've turned to rattlesnake all right. Look out when I strike. Yours respectfully,

RATTLESNAKE.

This is the beginning of one of the stories by

O. HENRY

Send Coupon for the 12 Volumes, 274 Stories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It costs 40% more to make these sets because paper, ink and binding have all gone up. This is your last chance for the low price. Send coupon today.

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Up—up—up goes the sale of O. Henry, higher and higher every day. Long ago he reached high above all records in the world for the sale of short stories. And still the sales climb until soon there will be no home without O. Henry. 1,600,000 already in the United States alone! The man on the street loves him; the university professor pays him homage. The sale of O. Henry will go on forever, for his is a quality that is undying. But the sale at this low price must stop at once. So now, while you can, get your set. You can have his work at half price if you send the coupon today; you can have, besides,

Adv. 3-17

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